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ABSTRACT

This study provides a perspective for social work educators who seek a response to the demands for accountability that have emerged simultaneously from the profession itself and from higher education. Part 1 presents an overview of the forces responsible for the move toward quality control in social work education. Part 2 is a detailed review of the University of Montana Department of Social Work experience in developing a summative evaluation for its graduates. Part 3 consists of four critiques of the University of Montana experience from the perspectives of: (1) establishing a competency-based curriculum nationwide; (2) undergraduate social work education; (3) the practice of social work; and (4) graduate social work education. Part 4 provides a case study of the curriculum at the University of Calgary, an example chosen to illustrate some of the problems and issues that may be expected to result from such curriculum development. (Author/MSE)

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Competency-Based Education for Social Work

Evaluation and Curriculum Issues

Edited by
**Morton L. Arkava
& E. Clifford Brennen**

**Council on
Social Work
Education**

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
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*Competency-Based Education
for Social Work:
Evaluation and
Curriculum Issues*

Edited by
Morton L. Arkava
and
E. Clifford Brennen

Published in Cooperation with
The University of Montana Department of Social Work

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COUNCIL ON SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION
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Foreword

CSWE is pleased to make available this publication, which appears at an auspicious time. Social work education is engaged in dealing with a multitude of issues, new opportunities, and the creation of ever-higher quality curricula and educational programs. Both social work education and social work practice are eagerly searching for methods that will prepare students in more effective ways and produce better services for people. In particular, educators are seeking greater clarity about their objectives, which in turn has led to experimentation and research on the effectiveness of educational programs. Both in education and practice such efforts are indicative of a general trend toward accountability, joined with a sense of creativity within the profession.

This volume is the result of an effort by the University of Montana Department of Social Work to clarify its objectives for

student achievement and to create competency-based methods of testing the outcomes of its educational program. Experts external to the program from undergraduate and graduate social work education as well as from practice were contributors and reactors to this thoughtful work. Social work educators at all levels are involved in a similar search for assessment methods. The Montana experience can be viewed as one step in a continuing process in which both educational programs and practice are engaged. The work is of great interest because of the process undertaken, the kinds of issues examined, and the types of answers found to the questions being considered.

This book is being published in cooperation with the University of Montana Department of Social Work and it is our hope that it will prove useful to educational programs as confirmation of their own efforts to create and utilize assessment methods, or as they continue to confront the issues reported and discussed here. Social work education is indebted to the University of Montana Department of Social Work and to the contributors to this volume for their cogent and perceptive discussion of evaluation and curriculum issues.

RICHARD LODGE
Executive Director

Preface

This volume provides a perspective for social work educators who seek a response to the demands for accountability that have emerged simultaneously from the profession itself and from higher education. The issues of evaluation of the baccalaureate social worker and related curriculum development are explored, and models for these two issues as strategies are tested. Part I presents an overview of the forces responsible for the move toward quality control in social work education. Different approaches to quality control are examined in Chapter 1 with a special focus on assessment efforts in social work and other professions. Chapter 2 offers a detailed look at characteristics of the competency-based curriculum as a model for achieving greater accountability in social work education, and several innovative activities related to competency-based education in social work are reviewed. The chapter concludes with a forecast of the

major ways in which this particular curriculum design is likely to influence social work education.

Part II constitutes a detailed review of the University of Montana Department of Social Work experience in developing a summative evaluation for its graduates. Chapter 3 considers evaluation alternatives through three perspectives: the psychology of individual differences, industrial psychology, and competency-based educational evaluation. All three traditions acknowledge that postassessment performance is the paramount consideration in determining assessment methodology, and that the manner of assessment should closely approximate the context in which performance will be judged.

Another commonality of the three perspectives is an emphasis on specificity of objectives (or criteria) as a means of circumventing problems of reliability and validity that plague so many attempts to measure complex performance. Conceptually, the procedure of approximating postassessment evaluation circumstances within the assessment tends to convert the issue of validity into one of test/retest reliability, while the search for specificity tends to maximize that very reliability.

A commitment to radical behavioral specificity is no panacea, however, because of the multiple number of objectives required to capture successful performance, and because the bounds of practicality are soon strained if employed in the context of an exhaustive assessment of something as complex as social work competence. The discussion concludes that there is no level of specificity which yields a clearly optimal assessment methodology.

Two techniques that do approach the goal of assessment/post-assessment congruency are simulation and work sample methodology. The advantages and disadvantages of each are considered and the general conclusion reached that past simulation attempts have been plagued with problems of verisimilitude and concurrent validity while work sample approaches have been hampered by problems of inadequate reliability of the global judgments that are usually employed.

Chapter 4 describes the process by which performance objectives for baccalaureate candidates in social work were developed, and further describes the summative written and oral examination employed to assess the competence of each student. The performance objectives represent an attempt to achieve a compromise between specificity and practicality. This collection of objectives then forms the basis for the evaluation instrument.

Chapter 5 presents data concerning the distribution of scores and reliability of judgments when the Montana Social Work Competency Scale (MSWCS) was administered to 31 students in the spring

of 1975. While there was clear evidence of a leniency effect (that is, a bias toward the favorable end of the rating scale) the MSWCS scores were, nevertheless, significantly more stringent than were field supervisor ratings.

Chapter 6 critically reviews the MSWCS, both from the standpoint of criteria and method. It questions whether the underlying performance criteria may overemphasize the rational problem-solving aspects of social work practice at the expense of affective and relationship issues. Another problem is that our work sample methodology, based as it is upon the student's field experience, unavoidably imposes an eleventh hour "sink or swim" character upon our evaluation efforts and fails to identify student weaknesses in time for effective remediation. Finally, issues of practicality have limited our assessment to student reports on their own practice activities rather than direct observation of these activities. None of these problems are insurmountable, but many of the solutions we have considered appear to impose as many difficulties as they eliminate.

In Chapter 7 the authors report on the effort to develop a competency-based social work curriculum at the University of Montana. Service area and program characteristics are detailed, and a number of factors influencing and conditioning the development of the curriculum are discussed. Key processual steps are described and the set of assumptions upon which the curriculum is based are delineated. The curriculum framework developed for implementation of competency-based objectives is presented with discussion of the component parts. Observing that development of a comprehensive program of competency-based education necessarily is a lengthy, complex, and demanding process, the authors conclude with a summation of the directions and emphases that will characterize future developmental efforts. The chapter is presented as an abbreviated case study of the early stages of an attempt to implement a competency-based curriculum with the hope that it will be instructive to other educators searching for and weighing alternatives for achieving increased effectiveness in professional education curricula.

Part III consists of four critiques of the University of Montana experience. The first, by E. Clifford Brennen, is a self-initiated review concerned largely with making competency testing operational nationwide. He observes that few undergraduate programs could meet the time investment required to conduct the type of testing now in effect at Montana. Beyond this, it is averred that tying the test to the practicum begets some undesirable consequences. First, one is obliged to impose a comprehensive test on a limited and variable field experience. Second, heavy reliance must be placed on the student's self-report of work with clients. Third, field supervisors re-

gard the work sample procedures as intrusive, distracting students from assignments. Finally, this approach to testing culminates in an all-or-none assessment of student competence just prior to completion of the curriculum, when the threat of denial of graduation faces students and raters alike.

It is suggested that use of the case simulation approach avoids such problems and offers advantages not obtainable through the work sample methods. Recognition is given to the need for research on varying approaches, and it is noted that current plans at Montana include a blending of both approaches to achieve validity and feasibility. This self-initiated review provides a viewpoint gained through the dual perspectives of a scholar who participated in this project while also serving as a member of the Council on Social Work Education's Commission on Accreditation.

Chapters 9, 10, and 11 consist of three other reviews of the University of Montana experience. The reviews were sought to elicit perspectives from undergraduate social work education, from practice, and from graduate social work education, respectively. Each of the three reviewers was provided with drafts of Chapters 1, and 3 through 8. They were asked to comment from their perspective and to offer their thoughts on research design.

Part IV, which consists of only one chapter, provides a case example of the development of a competency-based curriculum at another school — the University of Calgary. This case example was chosen to illustrate some of the problems and issues that may be expected to result from such curriculum development. Competency-based curricula do not offer an easy answer to the problems of achieving accountability in social work education. The adoption of such a program poses unique difficulties, as is illustrated by the Calgary experience.

With these reviews and our own critical analyses of our work, we sought to provide a reasoned and balanced view of some of the issues related to competency-based education and assessment in social work education. Clearly, our achievements have been limited and much work remains to be done.

We originally set out to establish a reliable method for assessing and thereby controlling the quality of our graduates. This effort to assess competency led to curriculum modification. It is our firm conviction that this project has been a valuable experience which has yielded some useful outcomes. The specification of the basic or core content of the BSW program, as identified in the "competence criteria" in Chapter 4, is a major step toward standardization of the BSW curriculum. The content included in the list of competence criteria is remarkably similar to that suggested in a recent paper devel-

oped by Frank Loewenberg.*

The importance of identification of the core content of professional social work education was underscored by the recommendations of the Council on Social Work Education's Task Force on Structure and Quality in Social Work Education.

Our success in finding a reliable method for assessing the quality of our graduates is more limited. While our assessment instrument and procedures have shown considerably greater reliability than other assessment alternatives currently available, a great deal of additional work needs to be done before the instrument can be utilized widely. For example, we have failed to achieve a high degree of specificity for our learning objectives. We need to refine our objectives so that they more closely approximate those suggested by Mager,** which include specification of performance, conditions, and criteria. Further, our assessment procedures suffer from the absence of a preassessment measure. Finally, the question of validity remains to be answered. Our plans call for a follow-up study of our graduates that should help supply answers to this question.

* Frank Loewenberg, "Identifying the Basic Core Content of Social Work Education," mimeographed (New York: Council on Social Work Education, September 1975), pp. 17-25.

** Robert F. Mager, *Preparing Institutional Objectives* (Belmont, Calif.: Fearon Publishers, 1962).

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PART I

*Accountability in
Social Work Education*

Chapter 1

Quality Control in Social Work Education

by MORTON L. ARKAVA & E. CLIFFORD BRENNEN

The development of the Montana Social Work Competence Scale at the University of Montana grew out of an attempt to specify objective performance requirements for successful social work practice at the baccalaureate level. This effort, initiated in early 1973, was prompted by the realization that the responsibility for ensuring minimal proficiency levels for the newly recognized BA social work graduate lay with the educational institution granting the degree.

We chose to build on a foundation well-established over years of social work experience: the criteria of field performance. As we began to implement our summative evaluation, the effects spread throughout the entire program, resulting in changes in curriculum, classroom teaching, and fieldwork settings. Thus our efforts, which

were originally focused on the evaluation of competence, expanded to include the related issue of curriculum development.

While our own endeavors have thus far yielded an assessment instrument and concomitant curriculum revision, we recognize that many questions remain unanswered. We set out to control the quality of our graduates in a more consistent manner than was formerly possible. Our objectives included the development of an assessment procedure that could be utilized by other social work baccalaureate programs. Our achievements thus far have been clearly limited, as pointed out in Brennen's article later in this volume. Additional limitations are identified by the other contributors.

It is clear from our experience that other approaches to the problem should be tested and evaluated. The authors of this volume seek a broad forum within the profession. We urge others to investigate different assessment modalities.

Graduate and undergraduate educational programs in social work are regulated through the activities of the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) and by regional accrediting organizations. The social work baccalaureate is now a practice credential, and the credentialing function is the responsibility of educational institutions. The credibility of the baccalaureate graduate rests on the assumption that social work educators are responsibly monitoring the quality of their graduates and that they possess relevant practice skills. Presently no evidence exists to indicate that programs have accepted this considerable educational responsibility.

Social work education programs are currently evaluated with respect to curriculum content, faculty qualifications, teaching methodology, and the availability of other educational resources and activities such as books and fieldwork settings. Budget allocations are usually based on enrollments, number of graduates, and qualitative measures related directly to cost rather than outcome. Quality, then, has been largely assessed on what is put into the programs rather than on what comes out. Evidence regarding the accomplishment of one of the primary objectives of social work education — that of preparing effective social work practitioners — has been lacking.

In a recent review of educational research, Milton challenged traditional beliefs on educational practices. He found that the traditional conditions for promoting learning such as small classes, discussions, frequent class meetings, and teacher feedback, showed no clear association with measured learning or later achievements.¹ His conclusions warrant the attention of responsible educators. In addition, the few available research studies on the effects of social work education on students pose questions about the efficacy of that education.²

THE ACCOUNTABILITY MOVEMENT IN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

A variety of forces has recently converged providing considerable impetus for the development of more specific, objective criteria that better describe the outcomes of social work education. This new emphasis on the competence of emerging graduates is keenly focused on the baccalaureate level and results from such diverse movements as the National Association of Social Workers' (NASW) efforts to achieve regulation of a multileveled practice; the new CSWE baccalaureate program accreditation standards, the newly emerging practice of granting advanced standing in graduate social work programs for selected undergraduate social work majors, and the general emphasis on accountability coming from within the profession³ and simultaneously from higher education.

As one response to the accountability issue, a strong priority recently emerging within the profession has been the development of reliable and valid outcome measures that can be uniformly applied to social work education. For example, in 1974 the NASW Cabinet of Professional Standards adopted a policy statement on legal regulation of practice that included the following requirement:

Legislation for the licensure of social work shall require that each level of practice, including that of independent practice, have a valid means of objectively assessing the qualifications, knowledge and *competences* [emphasis mine] of applicants for licensure, in addition to requirements for specific educational attainment.⁴

NASW has also questioned the adequacy of "traditional means for assessing the qualifications and ability of licensing applicants." The NASW Cabinet of Professional Standards has therefore stated that the profession should "encourage the exploration of the validity of traditional examination techniques in assessing professional performance and capability. . . . Explore the possibility of assisting in the development of new test modes . . ."⁵

Along with the NASW thrust, practice agencies have taken issue with social work education. The Family Service Association of America (FSAA) publicly criticized graduate social work education in 1972.⁶ The issues raised by FSAA related to the apparent disparity between the preparation of social work graduates and the needs of practice agencies. Although a dialogue between education and practice has ensued, no satisfactory resolution is in sight. The issues raised by FSAA clearly related to the absence of accountability of social work education to practice.

The move for greater accountability comes not only from within

the profession, but from higher education as well. As funding for all phases of higher education becomes more difficult to secure, educators are more pressured than ever to justify their programs in competition for dwindling dollars. No longer is it possible to declare the manpower "gap" as a reason for educational programs. Rather, educators must justify their programs by demonstrating the relevance of education to specific social problems. Legislators openly inquire now if social work education is necessary. Many are familiar with the often cited "success stories" of effective, untrained volunteer help. And, indeed, to deny their contribution would be dishonest.

To compound the dilemma, we are often hard-pressed to defend social work education programs when state and federal merit system tests fail to demonstrate the efficacy of that education. In many states, merit system exams for beginning social worker positions often fail to discriminate between social work majors and those with other education. Although this problem is not unique to social work, those who are eager to criticize the field have used this fact to challenge social work education programs.

Educators are increasingly preoccupied with defining the qualitative outcomes of college. Many colleges are experimenting with competency-based educational programs in response to the call for greater accountability. While this phenomenon has been largely confined to a few technical fields (such as education and nursing), it is now touching the liberal arts colleges.⁷ The movement has grown to such an extent that a National Clearinghouse for Competency-Based Education now exists at Bowling Green State University for the purpose of collecting and dispensing information about various competency-based programs across the country.

The failure to define outcome measures of education sufficiently has produced a gap between academic programs and higher education budgets. The growing national preoccupation with accountability in government, business, and now education has spurred an invasion of management experts onto campuses. Terms such as PERT, MBO, and PPBS that were formerly confined to business and government now crop up on the academic scene. Many educators are alarmed and justifiably concerned by this "invasion." The possibility of being managed by accountants looms ever-present and ever-threatening, for as long as we continue to leave major gaps in the educational structure, we will remain vulnerable to these invasions. And such is the nature of the management expert that he will try to fill those gaps with figures that may not be relevant to *quality* education, but are only quantitative in nature. An example of this tendency appeared in a recent management planning guide for higher education where quantitative variables of numbers of students, credit hours generated, and similar

numerical indices were utilized for educational planning.⁸

A real potential for being managed by accountants lies in the easy access to variables such as student-teacher ratios and credit-hour costs, in contrast to the relatively inaccessible variables related to quality. The principle here is that the easier material is to obtain, the more likely that it will be used as an indicator of quality. Because of this, higher education, including social work education, must address this deficiency.

The management specialists currently in vogue are the systems analysts. A systems approach to higher education requires identification and analysis of three separate but interrelated components. The first and most important may be called simply the outputs or objectives of the system. The specified end result of a system constitutes the rationale for its operation. Essentially the real purpose of a system is defined by what it produces. The second component includes the inputs such as teachers, library books, budgets, and so on. The third element is comprised of the activities or processes.

Thus to analyze a college or university it is possible to focus on any of these three elements: inputs, activities, or outputs. Unfortunately, most output measures have focused on gross indicators (the number of graduates or the number of credit hours generated). Social work educators and practitioners claim they are most concerned about the abilities of social work graduates. If this concern is truly legitimate, a refocus in social work education is necessary. Clearly, the place to begin analyzing or building a system is with its outputs. Not until the outputs are defined and lucidly described can we determine how we are going to produce them. Unfortunately the outcomes of most social work programs are currently defined in such global terms that a meaningful assessment is impossible. Our task is important — the concise explication and specification of the outcomes of different levels of social work education.

Although many social work educators recognize the need for a sharper focus on the qualitative outcomes of social work programs, they are quick to perceive the problems inherent in such an assessment effort. The desired outcomes are difficult to identify and agree upon because the goals and values of the individuals and schools involved differ. Even when consensus is reached on program outcomes, few explicit criterion measures as indicators of qualitative outcomes are available. Although the problems related to developing reliable and valid outcome measures pose difficulties, to delay an attempt at a solution would spawn even more difficulties. If we continue to postpone responsible development of meaningful outcome measures, others, such as the accountants, will fill the gap with irrelevant measures.

ASSESSMENT EFFORTS IN SOCIAL WORK

Efforts to evaluate the outcomes of education have lacked a systematic framework for evaluation. Since little agreement exists within the profession on assessing the competence of its practitioners, educators experience difficulty in specifying the competencies of their students. The primary goal of social work education is to prepare capable practitioners, and so the authors attempted to determine how competence is assessed among practitioners.

The NASW Committee for Assessing Professional Practice in Social Work developed a document in 1968 that provided useful guidelines for evaluating competence. The committee identified at least four different strategies for achieving this objective:

1. The evaluation of career patterns and work performance.
2. The use of standardized tests.
3. The examination of specimens of practice, including tape recordings and case histories.
4. Oral examination procedures.⁹

Although these strategies evolved to guide assessment at the independent practice level, they also provided a useful "list of alternatives" for assessing competence at all practice levels. Although somewhat abstract for immediate practical application, the strategies nonetheless constituted an important building block.

A 1971 report published by the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) contained a more detailed listing of the practice competencies required for social work at the baccalaureate level.¹⁰ However, the SREB endeavor did not extend to the development of a corresponding evaluation instrument.

A number of separate efforts to assess competence in practice have been launched in the field. Some instruments and local teacher-made tests are currently available to the persistent researcher. However, almost all of them suffer from varying degrees of infirmity consisting of either reliability deficiencies or validity anemia!

Several of the objective test batteries reviewed below display high reliability but their validity is questionable. Others lack the basic research necessary to establish either reliability or validity.

Kadushin and Kelling conducted an extensive review of existing outcome measures for social work education. Their conclusions regarding the state of the art were noteworthy:

There were a number of persistent problems encountered in conducting a research project . . . concerned with evaluation of social work educational objectives. Outcome research requires a clear statement of program objectives. At the start we attempted to clearly and explicitly define curriculum objectives.

We realized . . . that these are either too broadly stated or are implicit in the program . . . It may be, of course, that lack of clarity about aims and objectives of the educational program . . . reflects the general situation faced by the profession. Unless the profession is clear as to what it is the social worker does, the way he does it, and the ends such activities are designed to accomplish, schools of social work have no firm idea of what it is they should be teaching: they will have no clearly specified model of outcomes . . .

Another problem had to do with the availability of appropriate, valid, relevant . . . instruments for testing outcomes . . . It seems to us that it would be more profitable for the social work educational community to spend less time and effort on outcome research per se, but devote greater time to the development of appropriate instruments for use . . .¹¹

It is important to understand some of the historical antecedents in social work education that have led to the absence of a standardized evaluation technology. Partially, the assessment problem results from the inability to resolve an important conceptual issue, namely the specification of the essential elements of practice. Although basically agreement exists among social workers on what general areas should be used to define practice, such definitions are too vague to facilitate a development of assessment procedures. Further, the distinction between knowledge and values advocated by Gordon and Bartlett in the NASW working definitions of practice has inspired separate tests designed to measure values (as distinct from knowledge).¹² Social work education's commitment to the difference between knowledge and values is explicitly stated in the thirteen-volume Curriculum Study published by the Council on Social Work Education.

The CSWE Curriculum Study, in turn, was influenced by the contributions of Ralph Tyler, who served as a consultant to the study and who advocated a sequential approach to curriculum development in social work.¹³ Tyler's approach called for identification of (1) the objectives of social work education, (2) the specification of learning experiences to meet those objectives, and (3) the evaluation of the effectiveness of the curriculum.¹⁴ Interestingly, the CSWE Curriculum Study focused primarily on the first two elements in the Tyler framework while the third element was deliberately omitted.¹⁵

A statement within the Curriculum Study provided a glimpse into the rationale for curriculum development.

Professional skill is expressed in the activities of the social worker. It constitutes his artistic creation resulting from three *internal* [my emphasis] processes: first, conscious selection of knowledge pertinent to the professional task at hand; second, fusion of this knowledge with social work values; and third, the expression of this synthesis in professionally relevant activity.¹⁶

Clearly, much of the intended result of social work education can only be inferred and not realistically measured. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that development of social work curricula and related evaluation endeavors has been somewhat handicapped through the inherent drawbacks to measuring internal process that can only be known through inference.

Most evaluation efforts in social work reflect the historical divisions of knowledge and values. In general, however, four distinctly different types of measurement strategies have evolved: value inventories, knowledge inventories, skill assessment scales, and simulation models.

Value Inventories

Value inventories, a popular choice among social work educators, are seldom excluded from any major evaluation effort. Their application is largely based on the premise that the value structure of the profession forms the basis for professional practice, that is, the learning and incorporation of appropriate social work values is an important task for all students. The significance of values to the profession is explicitly recognized through the publication of a separate volume entirely devoted to values in CSWE's Curriculum Study.¹⁷

Perhaps the major limitation of previous attempts to measure the acquisition of values sprang from a focus on "knowing" as opposed to "doing." The measurement efforts we have reviewed primarily assessed the student's internal intellectual processes by inference rather than direct application to practice. Thus it is difficult to validate the measures without ready reference to empirical data or criterion measures. Another restriction is the fact that value inventories can be easily faked by respondents.

The Social Work Interest Inventory by Axelrod and Gough, commonly used in social work education, was developed at Berkeley and later used at the San Diego State University School of Social Work from 1968-1970. The conclusions of the San Diego faculty were largely negative and did not support the continued use of that particular instrument. Student reports were also negative and indicated that it was outdated.¹⁸ Examples of similar instruments include the Meyer's Social Value Questionnaire used by Kadushin and Kelling in a 1973 study at Wisconsin,¹⁹ the Adjective Check List, and the Ames Philosophical Belief Inventory.

Knowledge Inventories

Objective test batteries are very popular among merit system examiners and college teachers. They usually focus on specific areas

such as "social welfare policy and services," or "social work research." Several of the objective test batteries in use produce considerable reliability, but validity studies are too few. This type of test is limited because subject matter tends to be confined either to an individual teacher or a locality, or becomes quickly dated and in need of continued revision. The validity is questionable because the relationship between the ability to discriminate and recall specific content, and the actual job performance is not always lucid.

Standardized knowledge inventories in social work include the Minnesota Inventory of Social Work Knowledge, an 82-question multiple-choice inventory containing many objective information items.²⁰ A similar knowledge inventory related to the area of social welfare policy and services was developed by Clark at the University of Utah School of Social Work in 1971.²¹ Other knowledge inventories in use include the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare Merit System Exam for Master's Degree Social Workers²² and the ACSW Exam, an objective test administered by NASW and developed by the Educational Testing Service.

Skill Assessment Scales

Almost all available social work skill assessment scales grew out of fieldwork evaluation efforts. Skill assessment scales have been slow in developing and even slower in maturing. These instruments generally consist of lists of performance requirements for social workers in either live or simulated cases.

At least three separate attempts to appraise student competence were based on skill assessment scales: The Merrifield, Linfield, and Jastram effort at the University of Chicago;²³ a later effort by Schubert²⁴ at the University of Chicago that was based on the Merrifield et al., document;²⁵ and the Practice Skill Assessment Instrument developed at the University of Michigan.²⁶ All three instruments were primarily devised to assess student performance in fieldwork. Yet the potential of these tests for application beyond field performance has not been tapped.

The Merrifield et al., document includes a schedule of 64 separate performance items on which students are evaluated by a faculty team. Also included is a list of specific tasks required for practice such as "evidence of self-responsibility for acquiring and integrating additional knowledge and ability to work collaboratively and cooperatively with other professions."²⁷ The instrument's major limitations relate to inconsistent, disparate levels of specificity in each task definition and few clear guidelines to discriminate between acceptable and unacceptable responses.

The Schubert document has a series of five-point rating scales

designed to assess student performance in casework field placements. It is more behaviorally specific in identifying performance attributes for evaluation. For example, one area concentrates on the student's knowledge of social agency resources in the community. A very high rating is partially based on:

Discussion of other social agency resources with client where the discussion is consistently individualized, relevant to problem, and well-timed. It is clearly designated to enable the client to make use of the community services. When the possibility of a referral is being considered, student handles this with high degree of understanding of client's needs and capacities, and/or readiness . . .²⁸

A very low rating is partially determined as follows:

There is consistent tendency towards performance which would delay or impede client's use of resources, e.g., discussion of possible referrals may be superficial, inadequate, or irrelevant to a client's needs, overemphasized; student may respond to clients attitude with argument . . . may give information inaccurately, inadequately, excessively, at the wrong time; may show strong tendency to ignore client's rights . . .²⁹

The instrument's limitations relate to inconsistencies in the levels of specificity of the definitions and sizeable overlapping between evaluation areas.

The Michigan instrument includes a schedule of 58 separate performance items covering such topics as knowledge of the community, the agency, casework skills, and groupwork skills. However it provides only narrow coverage of the curriculum and is not a comprehensive evaluation document.

The Merrifield et al., Schubert, and Michigan efforts, together with the list of practice skills provided by the Southern Regional Education Board, establish a description of essential features of practice, and by so doing, comprise a necessary springboard for further evaluation efforts.

Simulation Models

Simulation offers an opportunity to test the response of students by posing a representation of practice. In a 1972 article, Meinert comprehensively reviewed simulation technology and its potential for social work education. His arguments advocating the use of simulations for education and evaluation are compelling. Everyone recognizes the advantages of the Link Trainer for pilot training in which the student "maneuvers" a stationary machine that can be programmed for problems encountered in takeoffs, actual flights, or landings. The pos-

ibilities for application in social work present some unusual challenges to the imaginative simulation technologist. The essence of the method and ultimately the "validity of the technique rests on the capability of capturing the essence of reality."³⁰

Several noteworthy evaluation efforts have grown out of simulation technology. These include *The Development of an Instrument to Measure Casework Knowledge (The Tulane Assessment Scale for Caseworkers)* developed by Harris K. Goldstein,³¹ and the Benjamin Rose Institute Interrupted Case Test. The Tulane Assessment Scale involves reviewing a filmed case contact and responding to questions about the film. The film is interrupted at different points and the student is asked to respond to a question in a test booklet. The test used by Kadushin and Kelling in curriculum research at Wisconsin was confined to the casework method. The movie is outdated and lacks verisimilitude. Kadushin and Kelling pointed out that the test provides "no objective criterion measure of the 'correct' responses . . . the correct answer is selected on the basis of a consensus of experts . . ."³²

The Benjamin Rose Institute Interrupted Case Test (BRI-ICT) described by Bloom and Farrar³³ was developed using the Tulane Assessment Scale as a model. However the BRI-ICT utilizes a printed case vignette instead of a film. It is a case study that involves casework, groupwork, and community and institutional settings. At selected points, questions are asked regarding the case and what can be done about it. A panel of experienced social workers was used to arrive at consensual answers to items for this pencil and paper test.

While each of the simulation tests described above seems to offer closer approximations to the realities of practice than other measures, further research is required to establish acceptable levels of reliability and validity. Perhaps one of the most crucial issues demanding resolution is how we decide what is the correct answer to a situation. Both simulation efforts rely on panels of experts to decide what is right and wrong. Collateral issues that warrant attention are myriad. For example, how are experts chosen and how much agreement exists among them? Also, test security (as related to reliability) is important. A simulation test may serve to standardize a representation of practice and thus appear to offer greater reliability than a real practice situation. But if the simulation is used more than once, students can learn the correct answers from those who have previously taken the test. To solve the problem of test security, a more complex set of branching responses — each branch leading to a separate set of choices — could be devised instead of the single linear responses used in the existing tests.

Obviously other problems of reliability and validity also require

research. The simulation model allows incorporation of the best features of the previously described management efforts and may be conjoined with competence scales and objective multiple choice items. It holds great promise for standardization of test stimuli and thus greater reliability.

ASSESSMENT EFFORTS IN OTHER PROFESSIONS

The perplexities of evaluation are not unique to social work education. As stated earlier, other professions have been concerned with this issue for years and some, especially those medically related, have provided useful models for social work.

Perhaps one of the more successful evaluation efforts has been accomplished in the dental hygiene field. Evaluation in dental hygiene education appears quite sophisticated and directly related to the issue of practitioner competence. In a 1970 document prepared by the American Dental Hygienists Association, a description of the requirements for the "minimal preparation practice" is explicated. In one area, radiology, the dental hygienist must demonstrate competence to "prepare a complete intraoral radiographic survey, including periapical, bitewing and occlusal radiographs . . ." To complete this task, one must accomplish the following subtasks with a minimally specified accuracy percentage. The students must "select film of correct size, current date — with 100 percent accuracy . . . , position patient correctly for each exposure — with 90 percent accuracy . . ." In the area of scaling and root planing, students must demonstrate ability to "scale teeth and plane roots without traumatizing hard and soft tissues" and are judged competent if they "used appropriate type, sharp, correctly contoured instruments with 95 percent accuracy . . . Completely scales teeth so supramarginal, non-decalcified surfaces are visually clean with 100 percent accuracy."³⁴

For each task thus identified, the student must display minimal competence through actual clinical application under supervision. The performance requirements then for graduate dental hygienists are objectively specified as the end result of the curriculum.

A similar program was developed for training paramedical personnel at the University of Utah Medical School through the MEDEX Project. Following are examples of minimal performance requirements for paramedics. In the "laboratory procedures" area "given multiple samples, the Medex will be able to perform and report the results of a: blood analysis, within 5 percent accuracy, including white blood count, differential count, hematocut . . ." In the area of "treatment" the Medex is expected to perform the following tasks on patients: "administer . . . injections, intramuscular, subcutaneous

intradermal, intravenous, . . . apply a plaster walking cast, apply splint to finger, hand, arm, and leg, etc."³⁵

In both the case of the paramedic and the dental hygienist, the outcomes of the program were specified first, followed by instructive training and a curriculum designed to move the student to a specific level of competency. In both instances the instrumentation issue was surmounted because live situational tests were used that reduced the distance between measurement and actual performance. This procedure holds great promise for solving some of the validity problems. It does so with a slight loss in reliability, however, since the variable content of live test could restrict an equal competence assessment of all students involved. To apply live situational tests to social work, educators must devise a standardized procedure for all live cases in order to test students' competencies equally.

Ideally, similar situational tests should be developed in social work and other human service professions. To initiate such a procedure at this time presents some difficulties, however. Some important issues need attention before this kind of approach may be launched. We must consider carefully the ethical implications and issues involved in using actual contacts for evaluation of students, possibly at the expense of clients. Secondly (related to the technical aspects of measurement), the lack of agreement among professional social workers regarding the right and wrong responses in a live-case contact poses a problem. A group of practitioners may not significantly agree on the correctness of another social worker's live treatment responses to clients. Solid agreement is necessary before related measurement issues, such as degrees of accuracy, can be assessed. Furthermore, the validity issue requires attention because even if consensus is reached among professionals — which simply may be a function of training — those responses rated as right may not truly improve the quality of social work services.

So, although a useful model is available in the medically related professions, we might also consider other models of simulation and analogue that have been successful in medical education. For example, the American Board of Orthopedic Surgery developed a multiple-choice test consisting of written patient-management simulations.³⁶ A more sophisticated objective test, the Simulated Patient-Management Problem, uses branching answer clusters that consist of simulation of a clinical situation with a corresponding set of multiple choice responses. The student selects a procedure that leads to a set of "patient" responses which in turn call for a second course of action, and so on. This method has been utilized with patient analogues or "dummy" patients that are computer programmed with symptoms. Each course of action selected leads to branching responses

and whole new actions.³⁷

The latter example constitutes a technique that allows students to respond on a dynamic basis as opposed to the static one-dimensional responses allowed on the more traditional case vignette simulation. Several of the simulations developed in medicine offer viable models for possible adaptation to social work. Their ultimate utility remains to be established by sound research.

CURRICULUM ISSUES AND PROGRAM DESIGN

From an examination of the more successful examples offered in medically related professions, it appears that an important prerequisite to the goal of identifying practitioner competence is the clear specification of those competencies. It is to this primary goal that we have directed our attention. Simply, we have elected to view our program at Montana from a perspective that appears inverted to the traditional educator: we have decided to start with the end product. Our focus on the "output" of the program is not accidental but originates in our belief that the responsibility for ensuring minimal proficiency levels in practice for BA graduates rests with the institution granting the degree. This stance contrasts with traditional educational programs in which the focus for curriculum building and the consequent selection of subject matter and learning experiences are several steps removed from the end product.

The education model that best describes this approach is known as competency-based education. Competency-based education is not new; its elements were contained in Tyler's 1950 formulations.³⁸ However it is not widely used in social work. Competency-based education is often confused with performance-based education. Although the terms are sometimes used interchangeably, they are not equivalent. "Performance-based" refers to the development of a particular course while "competency-based" refers to an entire program. The basic elements of competency-based education as applied to social work were summarized by Armitage and Clark:

1. The ultimate purpose of the profession is practice.
2. The purpose of professional education is to effectively teach practice behaviors.
3. Practice behaviors can be specified as the operational objectives of social work education.³⁹

So the *raison d'être* for social work education is the student's performance of certain professional social work tasks. The examples provided from the medically related professions were clearly competency-based programs.

One of the more attractive features of competency-based edu-

cation is the merging of evaluation with curriculum design. The competency-based curriculum is derived from the attainment of specific competencies at a designated level of mastery. In the context of higher education, competence is the minimum of knowledge skills a person can be certified to possess based on a set of criteria or a level of expectation. The components of a competence curriculum include three elements: (1) explicit specification of educational goals in terms of competencies that learners are to acquire, (2) procedures for assessing achievement of competencies, and (3) learning experiences designed to enable students to attain those competencies. Several competency-based programs have been developed in related human service professions.

Thoresen developed this kind of curriculum in counseling psychology at Stanford, which provides for ongoing assessment of trainees. Counseling students are evaluated on their performance of behaviorally defined counseling tasks. A checklist of tasks is utilized along with evidence through videotape recordings.⁴⁰ Not surprisingly, the task checklist resembles the social work instrument developed by Merrifield et al.

A similar competency-based program developed by Anderson and Ames in counselor education at Gonzaga University is based on evidence of task mastery and utilizes a checklist of counselor tasks that includes such items as "the student can describe and explain the services which counselors are expected to provide to clients in an institution where they serve their practicum."⁴¹ Again, the performance areas identified in the checklist are akin to those developed by Merrifield et al., Schubert, and the Michigan group.

Other competency-based programs have been developed by Fuller and associates for manpower counselors in Oregon⁴² and by Bates and associates for school psychologists and counselors at the California State University in Fullerton, California.⁴³

Competency-based programs have appeared only recently in social work education. Although such programs are not fully developed, several are known to this writer: at the University of West Virginia, Case Western Reserve University, Southern University, the University of Calgary, and our program at the University of Montana. No doubt other schools have developed similar programs. Our program and the University of Calgary program are both described in detail later in this publication.

There are dangers inherent in the move toward greater specificity of our curricular objectives. One of the more obvious dangers is that of becoming preoccupied with trivia. Competency-based educational programs may lead to focus on innumerable and sometimes irrelevant details. The functional task analysis approach pioneered by

Fine and associates exemplified this practice.⁴⁴ Similarly, the tendency to develop abstract performance criteria also must be avoided. Finally, special care must be taken to avoid oversimplification of the social worker's job.

It would be a drastic mistake to ignore the knowledge explosion and to teach students only the technique of the moment. Professionals must also learn how to go on learning. Bruner urged that we address this by teaching fundamentals rather than just technology.⁴⁵ Blackey also advocated that we avoid a narrow focus on facts alone and try, instead, to teach the interrelatedness of ideas.⁴⁶

The rationale for our approach to curriculum development and the interdependent task of evaluation rests on the assumption that the end product of the curriculum can only be known from the behaviors of the learners. Thus we designed our evaluation efforts to sample *behavioral products* such as writing, speaking, and the provision of social work services. We assumed that the behavioral productions of the students were the end product of education and the students' idiosyncratic internalization. Admittedly, our procedures have been limited to assessment of documents and oral productions that describe the students' practice experiences. The procedure is flexible enough, however, to move closer to practice and utilize video and audiotapes and other samples of direct practice.

No single approach to the issues raised above appears to address adequately all of the attendant problems. Our approach has raised many questions, including that of feasibility. Further, we do not have complete agreement even among our faculty. There is room for discussion and informed dialogue. The format of this publication is intended to stimulate other approaches to the problem. However, our final decisions ultimately must be based on a solid foundation of empirical research.

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Chapter 2

Characteristics of The Competency-Based Curriculum

by FRANK W. CLARK

Social work practice is behavior, and as behavior is subject to analysis, change and improvement. Social work teaching is behavior and as such is also subject to analysis, change and improvement.¹

INTRODUCTION

Heightened interest in the competency-based curriculum in social work education can be documented by the steadily increasing number of articles, presentations, and program descriptions made available during the last five years. While most educators see the com-

petency-based curriculum as a relatively new focus, it is clear that educational programs with a focus on the demonstration of achievement and practical accomplishment have been a part of American education for over a hundred years. As Tyler pointed out in an interesting history of efforts to develop competency-based programs, the Morrill Act of 1862 provided the basis for an applied education oriented to the needs of farm and townspeople who could not attend the more exclusive and prestigious universities and colleges of the eastern United States. Through new land-grant colleges, curriculum development attempted to address "what was relevant to their lives and future plans." As a result many courses were organized to aid students in dealing with applied problems of life and career. Examinations frequently called upon students to demonstrate their knowledge through "practicals" or exercises emphasizing applied problem solving. Tyler discussed how the idea of the competency-based curriculum has continued to form in a variety of programs and disciplines over much of our past educational history.²

One key to understanding the current interest in competency-based education is the impact of a philosophy of pragmatism and accountability. The major goal of competency-based education is the development of demonstrably effective social workers. This renewed emphasis may be timely. As Stuart declared:

The current state of human welfare services in the United States is one of chaos and crisis stemming from growing demands for services which have progressively become less effective. While it is commonplace to attribute such failures to an insufficiency of resources, recent history has shown that the commitment of vast resources to problematic situations often has the effect of deepening the quagmire and impeding the prospect of change. Certainly more resources in the form of money and manpower will be needed in order to stem the tide of human misery in the United States. But these resources, when not accompanied by revolutionary changes in the technology through which they are applied, are likely to be little more than palliatives. To facilitate these necessary changes in technology, all of the human services will have to educate students for changing rather than static roles in society, providing them with skills which have sufficient flexibility to prove their value in programs not yet conceived.³

Ultimately, social workers and others provide the operational definitions and thrusts of social policy through their actions. This point is well made by Kahn who suggested that:

practice enacts policy. What the practitioner does, how he relates to clients, the way in which he exercises discretion, the priorities he places upon his time, the details of his role structuring are all ways of setting the direction, content, milieu and

atmosphere of programs. The practitioner sets, modifies or negates policy in his every action. He often settles what programs mean and do to or for people.⁴

More than others, it is the social work practitioner who will define the nature of social policy and practice to the larger society. It is the practitioner who will define the effectiveness of the progression to clients and to the community. In an era of accountability, the issue of effectiveness must weigh as heavily on social work education as it does on the profession itself. As Briar pointed out:

The challenge of effectiveness is at once more fundamental and in some ways more difficult than those we have confronted before. More fundamental because if the profession is weakened or crippled by attacks that are justified on the grounds of our ineffectiveness, then clearly social work will be less able to contribute to the solution of problems such as racism and poverty. And the charge of ineffectiveness is especially difficult because while it is clear *what* needs to be done — namely to develop more effective ways of achieving our objectives — it seems less than obvious *how* it can be done.⁵

It is to this challenge that the competency-based curriculum addresses itself.

COMPETENCE IN SOCIAL WORK

What is a competent social worker? This question has confronted social work educators over the years. Given the diversity and range of practice, it seems doubtful that anything resembling accord will be reached on the basis of discussion alone. This may not be unfortunate, however, because what seems needed is an empirically developed orientation to competence instead. Perhaps it would be useful to identify definitions of competence that will *not* be used in this chapter.

First, it is sometimes common to define competence in relation to personal characteristics of the social worker. Being aware, open to experience, identified with professional values, creative, and willing to take risks are all valued characteristics. While appealing, this approach presents a problem in both the selection and generality of adjectives. Ideally, competent workers often approach superhero dimensions and must have been born on the planet Krypton and adopted at an early age by Jane Addams or Saul Alinsky.

Second, competence often may be imputed to professionals whose activities are legitimized and praised by clients. Client-reported satisfaction with services is the major criterion used. While this is important, it is not persuasive, since the basis for the judgment is seldom described in enough detail to permit its objective and impartial examination.

Third, those assertively acting within the framework of a role acceptable to a given audience or public may appear competent, that is, the persons seem to know what they are doing. Personal style may also enter into a definition as well. While two persons may behave in a manner corresponding to a given acceptable role definition, the attractiveness or perhaps novelty of one's style may enhance one's role-taking and hence competence. While credible and attractive role-taking are probably significant factors, they are inadequate alone, since their relation to client benefits is unspecified.

Finally, other indirect means of inferring competence consist of observing the possession or display of symbols presumably given or awarded because of effectiveness, or are related to the possession of specialized knowledge techniques or jargon. These means are also subject to the critiques mentioned above.

A DEFINITION

In this chapter, competency refers to a state of fitness for a situation or purpose. Thus it becomes clear that unless the purpose or situation against which "fitness" can be tested is specified, it is not possible to determine whether a person is "competent."

How are value judgments of "degree of fit" made? First, one may make judgments concerning competency on the basis of agreement among members of relevant groups. In judging teaching competency, for example, one could ask students, fellow teachers, and other groups to identify the competency elements of "teaching." The teacher's performance could then be assessed relative to these criteria, and a judgment made. This means of defining the competency components for social work is illustrated by Kirlin, who suggested that:

These components should be based upon the faculty's conceptions of professional competency. Utilizing clearly stated behavioral expectations, the faculty should develop competency categories which are acceptable as a criterion framework against which the students' performance is measured.⁶

It should be noted, however, that when an assessment of competence is dependent only upon agreement of persons in relevant reference groups, the definitions may not necessarily be related to their actual relative utility for generating desired and relatively predictable consequences of benefit for clients. Alone, it may simply reflect the old traditions, biases, and superstitions of the reference group, providing little feedback for effective change.

A second and preferable means of identifying competence in relation to the situational context is to assess effectiveness of the professional in producing desired consequences in the social environment

of interest and importance at a given time. This approach emphasizes the relationship between performance and consequences, and is objective-centered rather than method-centered. It recognizes the plurality of potential means for reaching a desired goal, while simultaneously emphasizing the comparative merit of assessing competent behavior in terms of outcome. This functional definition for competence encompasses the potential for both desirable and undesirable outcomes. The deliberate assessment of this relationship is a source of feedback in the search for increased competence. Effectiveness in identifying and achieving feasible and valued objectives, in assessing progress toward their attainment, and in making the necessary "mid-course corrections" based on that assessment is synonymous with competent performance in social work practice.

"Competence" as a term acquires multiple meanings over time. Sanders suggested that it may be considered in view of its meaning for curriculum builders, or in relation to issues of measurement. These two considerations produce divergent definitions.⁷ For curriculum building, competence may be considered a hypothetical construct, similar in construct properties to other terms such as motivation, intelligence, skill, or ability. When curriculum builders speak of identifying competencies or describing competency, they refer to the creation of a competency identity. What are the definitional parameters of these identities? What is the evidence for validity of the construct? In view of the diversity of ways in which the term is used as a hypothetical construct, closer attention must be paid to these questions.

Secondly, Sanders pointed out that the term is used in relation to a major measurement issue. At what criterion level, under what conditions is a person considered to be competent? This definition places greater emphasis on the standard of performance and provides a foundation for questions of assessment, such as criterion versus normative reference testing, reliability of measurements and concurrent and predictive validity of the measure.

In this chapter, competence will be used to encompass elements of both emphases identified by Sanders, in keeping with current usage of the word. However, future works should consider the possibility of a more precise definition and perhaps reserve a like term "ability" for the concept and use competence in relation to the performance measure. Here the author takes the position that competence cannot be considered meaningfully apart from the measurements used to identify its presence. The construct establishes the direction and the limits for measurement, and once performance tests exist, they become the operational definitions for competence.

David Riesman, while visiting a competency-based program in Florida, reportedly expressed his dissatisfaction with competency-

based criteria and expressed a preference for "list of attainments" as an alternative.⁸ Riesman's suggestion warrants consideration, for it focuses attention on the situationally specific temporal aspects of competent performance.

Competence is not a personal trait. It is treated here as a specific accomplishment of an objective. It is not assumed unless evidence supports that once a competent performance has been demonstrated, it can be demonstrated at other times and at other places. This will depend on the nature of the performance and a host of situationally relevant factors. For example, once most people have learned to ride a bicycle, they can do so again years later. Yet the same cannot be said for the demonstration of competence in advanced statistical procedures (at least from the author's experience!). A period of disuse produces a performance decrement. The social setting will also tend to influence the display of competence. For example, the presence and form of a communication skill such as "paraphrasing" is shaped by the effects of social setting.

Continuing research is required to understand better the relation between competent performance or attainments in social work practice and the durability of such performances over time and across settings. Because of the relative dearth of information on this topic, it seems reasonable to adopt the strategic assumption that competence is situationally specific: that competent performance is not automatically durable or reliable over time; that the generalization of competent performance to new settings, even when related, will not occur automatically; that the generalization of competent performance to new but related performances will not occur automatically. Thus both the development of practice behavior and the maintenance of competent performance require separate attention.

A RATIONALE FOR COMPETENCY-BASED EDUCATION

The rationale for competency-based education can be simply stated. Social work education has as its responsibility the preparation of persons to fulfill social work roles in ways of demonstrable benefit to others. Being effectively helpful requires the social worker to act, to engage in practice behavior. This behavior is the operationalized definition of integrated knowledge values and skills expressed humanly. It is a holistic expression of the person, representing affective, cognitive, and psychomotor resources of the moment. To engage in effective practice is no simple matter. It is complex and dynamic, requiring comprehensive knowledge of a number of interrelated systems. Behaviorally, this knowledge is expressed as the ability to exercise systematic directional influence in each social system.

The rationale for competency-based social work education rests on several assumptions.⁹

1. *The ultimate purpose of professional social work is practice.* A profession is sanctioned to identify and meet certain social needs through the provision of service. The form of service provided is in large part determined by the practice behavior of social workers. To advance its ability to function, social work must be perceived over time to offer necessary, desirable, visible, and effective service. Failure to do so will continually weaken and erode its ability to advocate progressive social change.
2. *The purpose of professional education is to teach effective practice behaviors.* Social work education appropriately attempts to advance the nature of practice through a professionally self-critical posture reflected in scholarship, research, and teaching. It also advances current practice through identifying, selecting, and teaching practice behavior known to be effective for specific purposes and yet flexibly utilizable in a number of settings. Advanced professional education may more narrowly define specialized practice behavior.
3. *Practice behaviors can be specified as the operational objectives of social work education.* The effectiveness of the school's curriculum may be assessed by the adequacy of its students' preparation for practice. This assessment must be made through direct evaluation of student practice behavior in both field and simulation settings. As Pincus and Minahan pointed out, "the credibility of the profession of social work rests on its ability to demonstrate that it can bring about the changes it claims to make."¹⁰ This is also true for competency-based social work education.

A common assumption in social work education is that if students possess the necessary knowledge and personal attributes, their abilities will "emerge" through continued exposure and experience in practice. This assumption appears to be an article of faith rather than based on a theory of human learning with empirical support. What one more typically observes is usually a form of practice that is patterned after and maintained by the status quo of the work setting.

Competency-based education takes an alternative position. If social workers are to practice in a manner consistent with contemporary knowledge, theory, and method, the modes of practice must be present in the social workers' repertoire before their selection can take place. Social work educators must, therefore, ensure that the components of effective practice exist in the behavioral repertoire of

students, and that through demonstration, students are able to show their appropriate, flexible, and effective use.

DESIGN CHARACTERISTICS OF COMPETENCY PROGRAMS

In order to qualify as having a competency focus, a curriculum plan must contain three basic parts: (1) clear statements of the competencies to be demonstrated, (2) a system for assessing student performance that has a direct relationship to each competency statement, and (3) a learning environment explicitly organized to assist students in acquiring the competencies.

Competency-based programs have been operationalized in many ways. Despite the diversity of efforts, however, most programs tend to share certain common characteristics. These are described below.

Goal or Outcome-Focused

Attempting to educate effectively means that the program will concern itself with the success or accomplishments of its students in practice settings or simulations. Effectiveness does not require that the practitioner accomplish given ends against all odds and despite real barriers, but that a reasoned judgment of what constitutes feasible goals be made, and that efforts be measured against those goals and objectives.

Teaching and Learning Defined in Performance Terms

Learning is defined in competency-based programs as the change from nonachievement to achievement of student objectives. For learning to be identifiable, a statement of student objectives must be made before and after learning activities take place. Teaching consists of creating the conditions in which learning occurs. This definition is purposely open and intended to invite variety in the ways educators provide operational examples.

Outcomes Stated as Behavioral Objectives

The outcome measures of the total program and its parts will be specified as behavioral objectives. Basically, a behavioral objective is an observable criterion for performance that identifies the conditions under which a person's effort or product will be considered an accomplishment of the objective. The behavioral objective has three major attributes.

1. It must contain a description of observable behavior or an observable consequence of behavior, that is, a product such

as a paper, that will demonstrate mastery or attainment of the objective.

2. It must specify the criteria that will be used to evaluate the adequacy of attainment of the objective (exactly how the behavior is to be judged as adequate or inadequate).
3. It must specify the conditions under which it is to be demonstrated (time, place, other people, physical setting).¹¹

While it is relatively easy to state the criteria for a behavioral objective, it is more difficult to develop them in educational programs. Yet, well-stated behavioral objectives give substance and meaning to learning experience by indicating clearly expected student performance and proficiency level.

Behavioral objectives may be written for learning associated with cognitive, affective, and psychomotor response domains or for performances representing aspects of all three. Clearly stated, they become a reference point for evaluating the applicability of the instructional unit to the objectives, the students' capability for entering the learning experience, and the level of student proficiency as a result of the learning environment. Behavioral objectives orient students toward successful accomplishment, and when properly stated, will provide descriptive information usable to them as a source of learning.

Most competencies can be grouped in competency areas and identified by conducting a systematic task analysis of social needs and required social work roles. Stuart, for example, has identified seven generic skill areas that he believes are necessary for direct human service roles:

1. Observation skills.
2. Problem formulation skills.
3. Skill in the functional analysis of behavior.
4. Skill in interpersonal management with relevance to the process of inducing, maintaining and terminating client participation in treatment through persuasion (including cognitive restructuring) and techniques of interpersonal influence (including differential social reinforcement).
5. Skill in treatment assessment.
6. Skill in the analysis and change of agency and organizational variables which facilitate or impede service delivery.
7. Business skills such as benefit cost analysis and record keeping.¹²

In any educational setting the use of behavioral objectives must be complemented and supported by a clear understanding of the needs of society and just as importantly, of students. They must be supported by a clear understanding of the mission of the school, and the means for its attainment through a well-stated philosophy of ed-

ucation, an empirically substantiated theory of learning, and its consistent application.

Criterion-Referenced Performance Assessment

Performance assessment is an important element in the competency-based program. Behavioral objectives form the cornerstone for the assessment. Adequate demonstration of the competency in terms of the stated criterion characterizes what is referred to as "criterion-referenced tests" (as opposed to a procedure of evaluating students relative to the performance of other students, known as "norm-referenced testing"). Since meeting the criteria is identical with demonstrating the competency, most programs describe evaluation as a pass/no-pass or pass/try-till-you-pass system. When grades must be awarded, they are usually based either on number of competencies completed or the special characteristics of the competency level completed. In the latter case, several behaviorally defined competency objectives may provide alternatives to demonstrating the same goal. The alternatives are ranked according to level of difficulty, complexity, or sophistication and graded accordingly.

The try-till-you-make-it characteristic of most competency programs, together with the amount of descriptive information provided, has the effect of making assessment a functional part of learning. Students who decide to work toward a given set of competencies are much less likely to find themselves being assessed on criteria that are unknown, unshared, or irrelevant to their purposes. Personal learning and challenge are stimulated through minimizing evaluations based on competition and emphasizing personal accomplishment.

Most instructional units are characterized by both pre and post-assessment. The purpose of preassessment is typically to gain preliminary feedback regarding the clarity of the objective, to permit an assessment of the individual levels of readiness or preparation to enter the unit, to adjust the criterion level if necessary or possible, to orient students to the learning experience, and to stimulate participation. Postassessment of student achievement permits both an evaluation of student performance as well as an evaluation and modification of the learning unit.

While not necessarily true for subobjectives, most, if not all, major program objectives are evaluated through a system of *applied performance testing*. As Sachse defined the term: "applied performance testing is the measurement of performance in an actual or simulated performance setting. The key phrase in this definition is 'simulated or performance setting,' which stipulates that an examinee must actually *demonstrate* the ability to perform the required task."¹³

There may be a number of competencies considered as possible

prerequisites for applied performance tasks, such as describing the difference between residual and institutional features of social welfare or identifying the variables governing communication between groups in a bargaining relationship. However, they would not usually be considered as applied performance tasks for a BSW practitioner. Tasks more likely to characterize applied performance might be to deliver a speech to city hall advocating a funded study of child abuse in the county, carry out the steps necessary in assisting a renters' group to protest effectively a rent increase, or to develop and monitor a behavioral contract for a delinquent child and his family.

In general a test can be considered to be of the applied performance type if the person's performance is similar to required performances in practice settings. This response dimension is more important in defining an applied performance test than the stimulus dimension of the test items.¹⁴ Most applied tasks in social work are relatively complex. As the description of the performance moves toward greater complexity, it becomes necessary to involve more judges in making a determination of whether competency has been shown. This permits one to distribute more randomly possible individual bias and error.

Multiple Means To Demonstrate Competency

Learning experiences that assist students in demonstrating achievement of competency are means to that objective. While ends and means may be interrelated, the end goal of accomplishment takes priority over the means for its realization, whether the means be learning experiences offered by the school or invented by the student, work experience, or opportunities offered by others.

There may be several constraints on the demonstration of accomplishment. First, the school's resources to be used for direct observation may be limited. Second, persons who are not normally observers on behalf of the school may make post hoc claims regarding the demonstration of competencies. Third, the demonstration observed may be imperfectly related in varying degrees to the competency as defined.

The value given to a goal-centered orientation will tend to reduce the idiosyncratic selection of curriculum content divorced from practice. While it remains the responsibility of schools to attempt to assess, select, and teach practice behaviors believed to be particularly useful for given purposes, the focus on accomplishment of objectives provides a flexible tempering of curriculum requirements away from institutionalized means and toward a heightened awareness of individual and cultural differences in effective practice.

Individualized Learning

In the competency-based program, it is recognized that students will differ widely in learning rates, styles, and preferences for learning objectives at a given moment in time. As a result, many competency programs allow students to work and study at their own pace, to choose from a menu of instructional modalities, and within broad limits, to choose the set of objectives that interests them most at a given point in time. The ability to choose from a set of objectives may result in unique patterns of sequencing for many students.

Most students are used to studying under conditions imposed by teachers and others in the external environment. While it is common to speak of working to meet a deadline, most persons in fact learn to complete tasks by a given point in order to avoid the consequences of not meeting the time limit. The opportunity to learn at one's own speed (self-pacing) is usually a novelty for those who have not had prior experience in competency-based education.

There are several proposed advantages for self-pacing. Since the literature on learning suggests that people do learn different materials at different rates and that the rates of learning themselves differ among individuals, students can learn more effectively if allowed to work at the rate most suitable for them.

In an educational system, other more compelling academic, athletic, work, and social events may be scheduled that are incompatible with studying. Students should be able to schedule studying in relation to the total constellation of events (which will be different for each student), which self-pacing does by allowing students to develop a time schedule and pace of study unique to individual needs and priorities.

Students find learning relevant to their needs when they are allowed to study under conditions of high interest and reinforcement. The ability of students to self-pace their learning and to study things of interest at a time when they are most receptive is an important characteristic of an optimal learning setting.

Practically, most competency programs find that administrative necessity requires some limits to be placed on the self-pacing characteristic. Students often demonstrate great enthusiasm for self-pacing and a flurry of activity during the first weeks of class, followed by a dramatic decrease in work output until the approach of the end of the course. This "cramming" syndrome is well known on college campuses and is seldom desired by either instructors or students. As a result, time limits may be set that can be modified as the program progresses and students learn to work within their own internal discipline.

For a given unit of instruction, students may differ in their preference for working individually, with another person, in a small group,

or in a presentation, discussion, or programmed format. As a result, for a given set of behavioral objectives there may be several instructional units offering different types of learning opportunities in each and providing students choices in how they may interact with the content of the unit.

Sequencing and integration in curriculum instruction are treated somewhat differently in the competency-based program for several reasons. First, integration is considered to take place primarily within the student and to be fostered through the requirement of competency demonstration. Second, because objectives are highly specified, they aid a determination of the specific prerequisite competencies a student must master in order to demonstrate the competency under consideration. Third, most instructional units are much shorter than those of semester or quarter length (to be discussed below). As a result, prerequisite learning experiences can be identified more specifically. Fourth, it is more typical for foundation method and field aspects of curricular content to be integrated within each instructional unit in relation to its competency objectives.

This approach to the issues of sequencing and integration permits a more specific determination of exactly which instructional units must precede other units. A common result of this analysis is the view that many instructional units can be considered to stand on their own or be preceded by fewer prerequisite units than might otherwise be the case. The operational consequence allows students a greater number of choices in terms of the order in which they may decide to sequence units. It is also common for programs to identify and separate required core behavioral objectives from other objectives considered to be either of a lower priority or supplemental to the central program objectives. This acts as a buffer to the tendency of required courses to proliferate in programs and thus to restrict the individual preferences of students. The identification and restriction of required competency objectives give a structural recognition to the desirability of options related to other objectives and to the value of curiosity, exploration, and novelty.

In relation to core requirements, some programs may specify educational goals in general terms and allow a mutual determination between faculty and students of the precise behavioral objectives. This also gives recognition to the individualized way in which competencies can be expressed, but also may provide a means for unintended and unplanned curriculum changes to take place.

Smaller Units of Instruction

Most study units are designed to be completed in a very short period of time and are conceptually related to the notion of "micro-

teaching" developed by Allen, et al.¹⁵ They are thought of as the smallest unit of instruction for a given purpose and are specifically developed for a given set of behavioral objectives. When a school has developed its program as a part of the larger college or university system and must express its offerings as "courses," a given number of instructional units completed may be defined as a course. As suggested above, the units do not have to be completed sequentially. The number of units in relation to a course is entirely arbitrary. Most instructional units are designed to be completed in twenty minutes to two hours.

The units, sometimes referred to as learning modules, are defined as consisting of those specific stimulus events that will assist students in achieving the unit behavioral objectives. As a result, the content and structure of the unit may vary in any conceivable way except its functional relation to learning. The most adequate instructional modules assist 100 percent of the students to meet the mastery criterion.

Use of Simulations

A natural outgrowth of the competency-based curriculum is its use of simulations. Opportunities for demonstrating certain competency objectives cannot always be predictably structured, or at times even found at all in field settings. The number of students in most BSW programs only complicate the picture. Additionally, students sometimes require a number of highly similar opportunities to respond to during learning. Finally, the potential hazards to clients and others in field settings put realistic limits on actual practice as the medium of instruction, learning, and student performance. It is because of these features of actual practice that simulations become useful.

What is simulation? While the question appears deceptively simple, a complete answer would require a considerably more lengthy response than is appropriate in this chapter. A clear summary of the meaning of the term was provided by Crow:

In sum then, simulations belong to that class of theory called models, since the structure of the theory exhibits the structure of the subject-matter, and are distinguished from other models in that they exhibit, in addition, the functional relations among the structural elements; by virtue of their dynamic, operating properties, simulations tell us something about the processes occurring in the system being modeled, since changes over time in the simulation correspond to changes in the system under investigation.¹⁶

Simulations have a number of advantages that Raser listed under the headings of *economy, visibility, reproducibility, and safety*.¹⁷ Simulations are inexpensive to construct, can eliminate costly mis-

takes that might cause waste or disaster, and are readily observed and manipulated. Simulations can be simplified through omitting nonessential characteristics of the reality studied, can be repeated as often as desired, are safer to use than actual settings under many circumstances, and appeal to students because of their realistic and dynamic properties. Horejsi described the use of simulations in education and listed three examples particularly useful in social work.¹⁸

Use of Educational Technology

Most competency-based programs are also characterized by the adoption and use of a variety of technological aids to learning. They use such items as programmed learning texts and machines, films and film strips, audio and video cassettes, microteaching programs, and computer-assisted learning systems. These innovations have permitted more individualized attention to students through their efficiency.

Student-Teacher Roles

There is a strong tendency for competency-based programs to utilize students as tutors for one another. Given highly specific objectives and instructional modules of relatively small size, it becomes possible for students to assist one another in working toward behavioral objectives. Students who have already mastered an instructional module are capable of becoming an important learning resource to fellow students by assisting them with material not well understood, and by assisting them to articulate what they are learning and to comprehend its meaning in relation to the practice implications. Student tutors can also assist in simulating practice situations through role playing.

The opportunity to function in both teaching and learning roles is valuable not only for the student-as-learner but in particular for the student-as-teacher. Responsive and facilitative teaching skills bear some relationship to more general direct practice skills. Tutorial role experiences allow students an opportunity for learning through interaction with others. It also provides an opportunity to review what was previously learned and as a result, aids recall and retention. As most new instructors have discovered, teaching is active learning. Advanced students may also update or create new instructional modules or simulations as optional experiences in consultation with faculty.

Faculty roles in relation to students are threefold. First, they manage and develop the learning environment. This role is broadly conceived, and while not meant to exclude teaching through direct didactic, experiential, or modeling activities, is intended to convey the construction of a wide variety of instructional modules that may

not require the physical presence of the instructor.

Second, the faculty role consists of acting as a coach and advisor for students. Competency-based education requires a considerable degree of self-direction and initiation on the part of students. Faculty members must ensure close working relationships to monitor and assist students with learning activities.

Third, faculty act as gatekeepers on behalf of the profession by assessing and evaluating student performance. While other students frequently also act in this capacity with faculty members, it is the latter who are directly responsible to the profession for decisions regarding the competence of entering practitioners. The amount of time related to faculty roles is often quite the opposite of what most faculty are accustomed to, with student assessment and evaluation consuming the most time, constructing and maintaining the learning environment following in second place, and advising individual students a close third. The activity that occupies the instructor most in traditional programs is direct teaching. In the competency-based program it is more typically found in the fourth position.

A Functional Advising Program

While alluded to immediately above, the advising characteristic of competency-based education is of sufficient importance to warrant separate attention. Most undergraduate programs give lip service to the importance of advising. This is possible because both students and learning experiences are grouped into large space-time blocks, there is an efficient structure for the external control of student behavior, and patterns for the selection and sequencing of learning experiences are relatively limited.

By contrast, the competency-based curriculum emphasizes individual learning and smaller groups of students working together, a relatively larger number and variety of distinct learning experiences, an emphasis on internal self-direction, and a larger number of possibilities for instructional selection and sequencing. As a result, the quality of competency-based education is largely dependent on an individualized, consistent system of student advising.

An Open System

The competency-based curriculum is characterized as an open system by virtue of the interdependence of its parts and the exchange of energy between system components and the environment. It is amenable to modification based on feedback from the functional consequences it produces. This characteristic of self-correction is particularly important and linked directly to the emphasis on assessment

and evaluation cited earlier. Feedback must be wide-ranging but it also must be directed to some extent by an orientation to competency-based education that gives it meaning. This point was well-stated by Glick and Clinch:

An open milieu in this context is one in which the personal development of the individual is of paramount importance; affective concerns are emphasized; problems, policies and actions are related to present realities and future possibilities; flexibility and adaptation to individuals' needs and interests are an integral part of the plan; there is a democratic procedure for establishing and maintaining the plan; there exists an integration, coherence, and unity in and from learning experiences.¹⁹

A number of similar characteristics also were cited by Jarrett.²⁰

CURRENT ACTIVITIES IN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

Social work education has begun to experiment with the competency-based curriculum model. To illustrate, several activities are described below.

The undergraduate social work program at the College of New Rochelle has introduced a Competence Based Performance Model as a means of specifying and assessing the measurable tasks considered to be related to effective practice.²¹ The tasks require students to demonstrate their accomplishments in relation to the objectives of each of the courses offered. These objectives attempt to integrate the values, knowledge, attitudes, and skills characterizing professional social work. Integral to the program is the joint student-faculty identification of competencies necessary for initial entry into the profession. This is accomplished through participant observation and assessment of the work of the profession, and analysis of emergent issues. A joint identification of the competencies required at the next level of study in the program is a final task of most concluding learning experiences. The tasks of observation, data collection, assessment, and analysis related to the above require both individual and group efforts and themselves provide opportunities for learning and the demonstration of operational accomplishment.

After the selection of competency objectives, the second step is their expression in behavioral terms. These behavioral objectives must "specify measurable attributes observable in those who complete [a given] sequence."²²

Another feature of New Rochelle's program is the explicit use of learning contracts between students and faculty. These specify the responsibilities of both students and faculty and the relationship between performance and grades. The contracts contain sets of perfor-

mance-learning tasks that vary beyond minimal levels of acceptability in terms of complexity, creativity, and sophistication, and are co-developed by student-faculty teams. Students then typically select from three contracts of differing demand levels. Grades are predetermined on the basis of the demand level of the contract. Particularly in small classes, attempts are made to individualize the learning controls as much as possible. In a report on this program, Magee suggested that "it is inappropriate for the difference between [performance sets] to be simply a matter of quantity of tasks. Behavioral performance is intended to measure levels of mastery, not endurance, and hence, must reflect a qualitative difference between sets."²³

During field placements, New Rochelle students continue to work toward demonstration of behavioral objectives related to knowledge of the field agency, development of social work skills, and development of increased self-understanding. They continually gather and assess data concerning their own performance, both for themselves and for field instructors.

At Florida Technological University, Hodgin is developing a basis for the assessment of competency skills based on theoretical indicants derived from interdisciplinary theories.²⁴ In constructing items, consideration is given to ranges of social work activity in four areas: the social worker as sociocultural agent, value agent, normative agent, and institutional agent. Five assumptive system questions concerning each range of activity are asked. What is the structure of each range of activity? How are the activities of each subsystem coordinated? What is the energizing force of each of the subsystems? What are the sanctions of each range of social work activity? What is the end result of each subsystem?

From an examination of theory, activity ranges, and system questions, the author has developed over 100 potential performance items. He found that the questions generated so far grouped themselves into the four traditional areas of casework, groupwork, community organization, and research-administration services. Work on this performance-assessment tool is still in the preliminary stages but it represents an interesting, logical approach to the identification of competence.

Glick and Clinch reported that the School of Social Work at the University of Southern Mississippi has begun a competency program in social work. The first step was to establish consensus regarding the essential competencies for practice, which were then introduced as the focus of the program. As they described the development of the program, they suggested four key elements.

1. Conceptualization of competency-based practice stated in behavioral terms toward which educational objectives will

- be directed. Criterion tests for achievement of objectives will be formulated.
2. Utilization of as many self-instructional methods as possible, rather than sole reliance on faculty lectures for cognitive information (related to skill competencies).
3. Utilization of modules of instruction smaller than courses, in which the objectives of learning will be clearly specified, the strategies of the learning experience will be delineated, and measures of learner success will be explicated. Options for "testing-out" of modules will be available to students in the form of pretesting.
4. Emphasis on a goal-oriented education rather than one which is process-oriented, thereby permitting students to have different entry points into the curriculum based on prior knowledge and experience.²⁵

Kirlin, of the University of Kentucky College of Social Professions, has developed an important monograph for social work education that provides a basis for establishing what she terms a "consistency model" for the evaluation of student performance. Although intended for a discussion of graduate education, it is directly applicable to the BSW and is essentially a competency-based model for education in the human services. As she stated:

This consistency model views student performance evaluation as an on-going process which (1) enhances the student's immediate learning and the development of habits and attitudes necessary for life-long learning; (2) generates the data necessary for the student and the college to make decisions relative to the student's learning needs, objectives, and progress within a framework of college objectives and behavioral expectations; and (3) links the evaluation of a student's performance to the evaluation of the educational program provided him (her).²⁶

Work at the University of Georgia School of Social Work is progressing on the development of performance objectives for both undergraduate and graduate students. An interesting feature of their approach is the attempt to apply similar objectives for both undergraduate and graduate programs. Thus thoroughness in meeting the objective over a series of worker-client interactions appears to be the criterion upon which differentiations between BSW, MSW, and doctoral programs are to be made.²⁷

Baer, of the School of Social Work at West Virginia University, has reported the development of competency objectives for both courses and overall program goals. An evaluation rating scale is used in assessing competencies in seven major areas: problem identification, goal setting, service planning and implementation, evaluation and feedback, relationships, dependability, and an overall global rating as a social worker.²⁸

Anderson, of the Jane Addams Graduate School of Social Work, reported the work of his own faculty in developing and using performance objectives as an evaluation tool in educating social workers. He also provided an analysis of implementation problems encountered in shifting to this system. First, social workers had little experience with performance objectives and there was little initial enthusiasm for adopting the new idea. Second, he suggested that social workers had been more familiar with process activities than outcome objectives and that initial attempts to describe performance stressed the former orientation. Third, he suggested that the lack of precise operational terminology to describe social work activities hampered efforts to identify specifically desired performance. Fourth, a set of clearly defined performance objectives was not necessarily applicable to school settings, which tend to be characterized by individuality in style and local school "culture." As he pointed out: "Words and phrases that can be used with ease in School A are tension-producing words in School B." Anderson also illustrated the importance of tailor-making performance objectives to the specific practice setting. In one school the performance ratings of students appeared to deteriorate. Contact with the field instructor revealed that while the performance of the students was adequate, the statement of objectives was not.²⁹

Casper and McKibbin, of the Syracuse University School of Social Work, have developed an interesting media-based performance test for work with groups. The context for the test was the development of an interest in behavioral objectives for education, instructional modules, and "test-out" procedures allowing students who could demonstrate the behavioral competencies to forego instruction. The assessment of students includes five phases:

1. The applicant chooses a role playing situation from among several options and designates in advance on the planning sheet (a) what predominant fact of group life he/she expects to be the focus of worker intervention during the ten minutes of role-playing and (b) which model for working with groups (from among those explored in the course) will be the predominant approach used;
2. The "worker" engages the role-players for ten minutes of video recorded action, while the "worker" is observed by his colleagues and the instructor who have been given the appropriate assessment sheets;
3. The recorded video segment is played back for the "worker" and the observer-assessors;
4. The observer-assessors, both students and instructor, complete the designated assessment sheets;
5. The applicant "worker" retires to complete his/her self-assessment;

Epilogue: The instructor compiles the summary assessment from all sources and provides appropriate feedback to the applicant, thus completing the learning cycle.³⁰

The performance observed in this simulation represents an example of the synthesis of a focus for intervention, and a model for intervention and widely accepted foundation concepts of social work practice (communication, problem solving, data collection and analysis, and the development of helping relationships). Preliminary evaluation by the authors and students provided support for the simulation-assessment as an appropriate rehearsal stage for fieldwork, and an exciting and potent adult learning experience in its own right.

Wodarski, of the Washington University School of Social Work, developed a program for the training of social group workers using a behavioral model. The model was chosen for its usefulness in operationalizing and assessing objectives. Development of the training program rested on completion of three tasks: operationalizing client behaviors to be modified, treatment procedures (behaviors of the social worker) and the collection of data relevant to both. His program includes didactic instruction, videotaped modeling of the procedures by persons competent in their use, role playing by students, and videotaped practice experience by students, which are periodically reviewed and assessed by both students and instructor.³¹

Jaffe and Shore, of the University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work, have developed an integrated approach to teaching social work skills and give attention to the cognitive, affective, and behavioral attributes of competent practice. As they pointed out:

as social work has moved from problem-solving (treatment) to include "developmental provisions" (prevention), practice has shifted from focusing on *methods* to focusing on *goals*. With this shift, it has become increasingly necessary to provide a frame of reference that uses a wide variety of eclectic approaches to helping, coupled with learning opportunities for the development of measurable competencies in the helping process.³²

Advocating the viewpoint that learning effectiveness is best directed at what social workers do, rather than primarily on the reasons given as a justification for action, the authors describe the emphasis of their program as being goal-oriented behavior, short-term, and task-centered treatment, with the major emphasis on skill training. Students are taught a systematic approach to problem solving, undergo an empirically based "relationship training" or communication skill-building program, and participate in a third phase designed to teach treatment skills related to specific client goals. At this point a system of criterion-referenced performance testing does not appear

to be a feature of the approach. Nevertheless, it is an interesting example of a performance-oriented practice course that seeks to provide students with an eclectically selected practice repertoire.

An orientation to goal-focused performance was enhanced through the use of contracts between student and instructor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison as stated by Flanigan. She reported the usefulness of this innovation as follows:

1. It gave the student power to design his own experience and goal.
2. It provided a tool for measuring growth.
3. It provided occasions for personal feedback.
4. It provided an incentive to move toward change goals.
5. It directly involved the student in a clear process of change.
6. It provided a context in which the student could not fail because he determined his own goals and could renegotiate if he found them unattainable.³³

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Having described the elements of a competency-based BSW curriculum, one might wish to speculate about the consequences of adopting the curriculum design in social work education. What is reasonable to expect of competency-based programs? The following possibilities are for the most part extensions of trends already noted. It should be stated that they represent the luxury of speculation — the author's best guesses — and as such should be viewed as tentative.

An incremental process of improving our ability to specify "core" BSW objectives. Slowly over time, we should improve the extent to which we clearly describe what abilities should be possessed by BSW graduates. More research on the relationship of particular practice abilities to practice outcomes will mean that certain objectives considered important at this moment will at a later date be abandoned, while others may gain in importance.

An increased emphasis on educational technology. Because of the difficulty of insuring adequate opportunities for students to demonstrate abilities in actual field settings at the appropriate time, it will be necessary to insure opportunities for demonstration through simulations and games that reflect practice realities and challenges. Computer-assisted instruction and modular learning will be developed for similar reasons. These developments probably will take place because the adequacy and fairness of student assessment is related to the degree of specificity and control of the event described as the practice task. The greater the ability to define and influence the practice task systematically, the more reliable and valid the assessment may become.

Strong continued student participation in the teaching enterprise. Students will participate with faculty in the teaching process because of one basic fact: the maintenance of a competency-based system requires considerable effort and resources to maintain itself. Most faculty cannot maintain a large-scale program alone, given the present student-faculty ratio. As a result, already competent students will be utilized as tutors and assessors for other students. The result will be a greater sense of partnership in schools of social work.

Closer, more functional relationships between social work education and the practice community. While social work education and the practice community will retain their prerogatives of observation and critique of one another, the common explicit goal of educating more effective social workers should move both groups into closer, more meaningful dialogue with one another. With more experience, competency-focused social work programs will extend the same type of analysis used in the school to the field itself. There will be a strengthened recognition of the role of situational contingencies regulating performance, and thus a probable refocusing of interest away from the social worker as the individual maintainer of competencies alone, to a recognition of the social services' and the professional organizations' responsibility for insuring professional development. Familiarity with use of learning modules in professional education probably will also lead to the increased use of intervention modules in practice settings.

Continued movement toward the use of "functional" professionals. The attention given to practice accomplishments probably will serve to strengthen the upward mobility of persons who do not possess the academic credentials but who do possess the competencies. This will stimulate social work to a redefinition of its professional role. This role will probably contain elements of the facilitator-planner-consultant, and will develop somewhat away from the direct intervener (similar to the role of the mediator as described by Tharp and Wetzel).³⁴

A strengthening of the role of applied research in social work practice. Accountability requirements already have provided a new impetus to the place of applied research, particularly in program planning and evaluating. One would expect this trend to be supported further by the development of competency-based programs in social work education. These educational programs should produce a new breed of social worker who will be oriented toward and skilled at operationalizing practice objectives and change strategies, and who will use the existing pool of quantifiable data as an indispensable means of improving service to clients.

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PART II

The Montana Experience

Chapter 3

Evaluation Issues

by DAVID E. CUMMINS

In attempting to derive a methodology for evaluating the competence of baccalaureate social work students one can, of course, choose to start from ground zero. Prior to selecting that alternative, it seems appropriate to survey the accomplishments and failures of others who have been long in the business of assessing performance. Beginning with Binet's efforts to predict scholastic success, the study of individual differences within psychology has had as its central concern the assessment of individual capabilities and attributes and the prediction of future behavior. For over 60 years, industrial psychologists have been involved with the evaluation of job performance together with the development of criteria upon which to base that evaluation. The field of education has been concerned with evaluation

for a very long time, and within the last 20 years or so, educational evaluation has focused increasingly on the use of performance-based methodology in attempting to determine the efficacy of educational programs.

All three of these traditions have direct relevance to the task at hand. Undoubtedly there are other sources that might provide evaluation models or at least interesting ideas that could enrich the pool of alternatives for evaluating social work competence. The choice to explore some of the efforts of the three disciplines is more a function of the author's background than a conviction that these fields are necessarily the richest sources of promising ideas. It is true, however, that one can usually trace the roots of current efforts to evaluate social work competence to the psychology of individual differences, industrial psychology, or criterion-based educational evaluation.

PSYCHOLOGY OF INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES

The study of individual differences has yielded many methodologies for assessment, but the paper-and-pencil inventory has been the technique used most frequently. Yet recently a large body of evidence has accumulated that questions the advisability of relying upon such assessment measures. Mischel presented formidable data which suggested that, with the exception of measures of intellectual aptitude and achievement, paper-and-pencil tests are generally poor indicators of subsequent behavior. He concluded:

Indeed, the phrase "personality coefficient" might be coined to describe the correlation between .20 and .30 which is found persistently when virtually any personality dimension inferred from a questionnaire is related to almost any conceivable external criterion involving responses sampled in a different medium — that is, not by another questionnaire. Generally such correlations are too low to have value for most individual assessment purposes beyond gross screening decisions.¹

Although Mischel referred specifically to the measurement of personality attributes, Ghiselli suggested that the situation is only slightly better when one seeks to predict job performance using paper-and-pencil measures of ability or aptitude.² The above quote alludes to the first of two central premises that explain the failure of paper-and-pencil inventories. Mischel held that any measure of an individual attribute is strongly conditioned by the response mode employed in obtaining the measure, and the details of the evoking situation. If there is little congruence between the situation obtaining at the time of assessment and that obtaining at the time of subsequent evaluation of performance, then one should expect little correspon-

dence between the two measures.

The term "method variance" is often used to describe the influence of the method of measurement upon the individual difference measure obtained. Campbell and Fiske devised a procedure to compare the relative contributions of trait variance and method variance, and found that the latter usually exceeded the former.³ Thus a paper-and-pencil measure of characteristic A is as likely to correlate highly with a paper-and-pencil measure of characteristic B as it is to correlate with, say, a behavioral measure of characteristic A.

Mischel's second premise, that behavior is determined to a large extent by the evoking situation, was borne out in a classic study by Hartshorne and May, which showed that children's moral behavior tended to be very specific to the exact particulars of the situation, that is, children were often quite willing to cheat in one situation but not so willing to cheat in another.⁴ Research since that time has pointed out the importance of situational factors and has cast considerable doubt on the assumption that individuals possess stable dispositions to behavior that operate more or less independently of the situational context.

Mischel's strong belief — that the manner of assessment should mirror as closely as possible the response mode and situational context of the environment in which later performance will be evaluated — carries with it the implication that the postassessment environment should determine the methodology used in assessment. We will find this position advocated again when we review the work of those involved in performance-based educational evaluation.

INDUSTRIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Although Mischel did not address himself extensively to the postassessment evaluation of competence, that is, the criteria for assessment, much attention has been given to just that issue by industrial psychologists. Criteria are defined as the evaluative dimensions by which an individual's performance is to be judged, ideally everything that defines competence on the job. A distinction is made between ultimate or ideal criteria, and actual criteria, the measurable indicators that are actually employed to estimate the ideals of competent job performance. Implicit in this distinction is the assumption that any actual measure of success will only approximate the concept of success on the job and invariably will introduce errors of omission and commission in the evaluation process.

Zedeck and Blood suggested that the adequacy of actual criteria be established by assessing the reliability, relevancy, and practicality of each measure. While they granted that a useful criterion must

yield a stable and replicative measure, they imposed further requirements of practicality and relevancy to the ideal concept of competence.⁵ In general, industrial psychologists have hesitated to subscribe to the position that it is necessary and sufficient for a criterion to be specific and measurable in order for it to be useful. We shall return to the issues of relevancy and practicality again in this chapter when we address the task of seeking useful criteria for social work competence.

One method that is often used in industrial psychology to develop criteria is to perform a job analysis, that is, to look and see just what an individual does on the job. Fine and his associates developed a specific method of job analysis and, furthermore, attempted to apply this method to the field of social work. They proposed a highly structured procedure called Functional Job Analysis that was developed at the Upjohn Institute for Employment Research. They were motivated to apply the procedure to the social work field after discussion with social workers enrolled in a training course led to the following conclusion:

When participants in the course were asked to describe their own work and the work of others in social welfare agencies, they found themselves in disagreement and confusion about what social welfare workers do and how to express those activities clearly and accurately. Since the design and construction of good jobs in an opportunity system require as their base a body of accurate information about what workers do, the confusion and disagreement among participants about how to describe the activities of workers in their field indicated the essential nature of the problem and where understanding and knowledge needed to begin.⁶

Functional Job Analysis established the task, that is, a specific action taken by a worker, as the fundamental unit of work, and sought to classify each task according to its level of complexity and the relative involvement of the worker with data, people, and things. Fine and his associates provided the following example of a task statement:

Ask client questions, listen to responses, and write answers on standard intake form, exercising leeway as to sequence of questions, in order to record basic identifying information (items 1-8). Data: Copying (complexity level 2), 50 percent; People: Exchanging information (complexity level 2), 40 percent; Things: Handling (complexity level 1), 10 percent.⁷

Each task statement is supplemented by performance standards, training content, and required level of development in reasoning, mathematics, and language skills.

Fine and his associates' involvement in the specification of what social workers do appears to have been limited to a rather brief demonstration of how their technique might be used. Subsequently, this procedure was employed in a guide entitled *Differential Use of Staff in Family and Child Welfare Services with Particular Reference to Subprofessional Staff*, issued jointly by the Community Services Administration of the Social and Rehabilitation Service and the Children's Bureau of Child Development, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.⁸ As one of three examples of the use of Functional Job Analysis, this guide listed 34 task statements under the objective "to recruit x number of foster homes for x number of children in x community during the calendar year." However, this objective was only one of many subsumed under one of a number of higher-level goals of one subsystem of a hypothetical child welfare agency. It is not difficult to see how an exhaustive analysis of the activities of the entire agency might yield task statements numbering in the thousands, with each task accompanied by a rather formidable list of attributes. This guide, as was the case with Fine and his associates' publication, made no attempt to provide such an exhaustive list, but simply provided several samples of the output of the procedure.

Functional Job Analysis does a remarkable job of achieving specificity in describing what a worker actually does on the job. It provides a highly structured procedural approach to job description and job classification. However, some form of data reduction is clearly necessary if the procedure is to yield a reasonable collection of criteria for successful social work performance independent of a particular job or a particular agency, criteria that can serve as objectives for educational programs designed to train generalist social work practitioners. The prodigious number of task statements produced by Fine and his associates' procedure tends to lend credence to a conjecture that we will return to again — that increased specificity in stating performance objectives generally has the effect of multiplying the number of objectives required to cover adequately the concept of successful job performance.

EDUCATIONAL EVALUATION

Another discipline that is energetically involved in the business of establishing performance objectives and assessing competency is the field of educational evaluation. While those involved are quick to point out that the evaluation of performance is less an end in itself than a means to assess the effectiveness of educational programs, they nevertheless share with industrial psychologists the need to establish criteria and evaluate individual competence. A particularly ac-

tive contingent within the field is committed to the development of educational objectives that will provide explicit descriptions of the postinstructional behavior desired of learners.⁹ It is important to note that such objectives serve simultaneously as goals for instruction and criteria for evaluation.

Much attention has been given to the format of educational objectives. Mager suggested that a meaningful objective should:

1. Identify the terminal behavior by name; you can specify the kind of behavior that will be accepted as evidence that the learner has achieved the objective.
2. Try to define the desired behavior further by describing the important conditioners under which the behavior will be expected to occur.
3. Specify the criteria of acceptable performance by describing how well the learner must perform to be considered acceptable.¹⁰

The purpose behind such specificity is straightforward — to reduce the complexities of measuring whether an objective has been achieved, to a simple process of observation and enumeration. Ambiguity is avoided and the issue of reliability of subjective judgment is completely bypassed. Verbs such as “understand” and “appreciate” are discouraged in favor of “will recite aloud” or “will select from a list.” Mager reacted to the objective “appreciate music” thus:

What is someone doing when appreciating? Sighing? Breathing hard? Reciting the history of music? Playing a piece? The expression doesn't indicate or even imply the performances that constitute the meaning of the abstraction. This is a fuzzy.¹¹

Mager provided the following as an example of a properly stated educational objective:

Given a properly operating XX-1 radar system and a standard kit of tools, the learner must be able to adjust the range marker of the PPI to acceptable roundness within a tolerance of 45 seconds. Acceptable roundness is defined as a deviation of one-eighth inch or less from a standard template.¹²

This particular approach has been challenged by those who claim that this methodology breaks down when more complex skills are involved. The debate will undoubtedly continue and certainly cannot be resolved here. However the author has not been able to discover an explication of social work competencies employing this format and achieving the specificity advocated by Mager. Perhaps a document entitled “Performance Objectives for Certification of School Social Workers,” developed by Daehling for the State of Utah, comes closest to it.¹³ Once again, in support of the conjecture that specificity tends

to multiply the number of objectives, it should be noted that this document is 105 pages long and consists solely of objectives and accompanying performance criteria.

Not all advocates of performance-based education hold that specificity at the level suggested by Mager is always necessary. Kibler, Barker, and Miles suggested that areas such as problem solving, creativity, attitudes, and the like will not yield easily to specification via precise behavioral referents, yet objectives dealing with these issues should be explicated with as much specificity as is possible.¹⁴ Armitage and Clark, in an article discussing design issues in performance-based social work education, allowed that there may be a level of specificity below which it is not productive or useful to go. They went on to suggest that:

The more comprehensively one can specify the objective the better, provided that: (a) the performers and observers of the performance can agree on whether instances of the performance did occur and (b) can specify reliably whether the performance observed was adequate according to the stated criteria for determining competence.¹⁵

The Competency-Based Undergraduate Education Center at Bowling Green State University, established to undertake research in the identification and validation of generic competencies, developed a statement of goals that provided a somewhat different perspective than that of Mager:

The key, and clearly most difficult, objective of the Center is to stimulate research that will advance our understanding of the complex skills and competencies that might comprise the developmental focus of general education. These, broadly speaking, would include cognitive, problem-solving, and conflict-resolution skills, together with the information processing, model-building and motivational capabilities that enable us to probe and wield alternate views of the human situation. The emphasis of the research here is to achieve a clearer articulation of the capabilities general education is meant to develop. We can conceive of several plausible, but incompatible paradigms for competency-oriented general education. Research designed to explicate any or all of these will be the Center's meat.¹⁶

Thus, the "can recite x items with x accuracy in x minutes" tradition within the competency-based movement, while perhaps acquiring the status of a shibboleth, is not the sine qua non of competency-based education. More and more there is a recognition that different levels of specificity may be appropriate and practical in different environments. What is fundamental to this movement is the commitment to using expected posteducation competencies to establish

educational goals. A commitment to behavioral specificity as a strategy to bypass the biases inherent in subjective judgment remains an important part of this tradition, but issues of relevancy and practicality sometimes conflict with specificity. In such cases, there appears to be no course of action that is universally correct. Trade-offs among considerations of reliability, relevancy, and practicality must be made, hopefully based initially upon reasoned judgment and buttressed eventually by the demonstrated utility of the instructional objectives chosen.

If there is a common thread among the evaluation concepts presented above, it is that postassessment performance is the paramount consideration in determining the methodology to be used. Mischel urged that the assessment circumstances mirror the environment in which postassessment performance will be evaluated. Industrial psychologists have long held that assessment is meaningless without accurate measures of worker performance. Competency-based education advocates believe that educational objectives, and hence what is taught and what is evaluated, should be completely determined by expected posttraining competencies.

PERFORMANCE CRITERIA IN SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

Unfortunately, as we direct our attention to the field of social work, and to the specification of skills that will ensure competent practice at the baccalaureate level, we run headlong into opinions such as that expressed by Horowitz: "A statement which would attempt to define that 'this is social work' would be both useless and senseless at this point in time."¹⁷ Whether or not one completely agrees with Horowitz, it certainly is the case that there appears to be little consensus about what basic skills constitute a necessary and sufficient basis for practice.

In the face of a lack of unanimity about performance criteria, and of the tremendously complex and varied nature of practice, what can be done? The alternatives seem to be to give up, or to devise the best criteria one can in spite of the formidable problems involved. At this juncture it may be well to recall that industrial psychologists have always assumed that actual criteria selected will only approximate the ultimate criterion — in our case competent practice. This should console us as we proceed.

It might be worthwhile to return to the three perspectives set forth by Zedeck and Blood for determining the adequacy of actual criteria — reliability, relevancy, and practicality. We need reliable measures of social work competence, that is, measures that possess

stability and consistency. The widespread use of subjective judgments of relatively global attributes in assessing performance is open to criticism because such judgments tend to be idiosyncratic and unreliable. As mentioned earlier, Fine and his associates and the competency-based methodologists have offered an intriguing solution to the reliability problem, namely, to state the performance objectives with such specificity that there is no room for ambiguity or unreliability in determining whether or not they have been achieved.

When we consider the issue of criterion relevancy, however, we are faced with the possibility that the specificity solution might remove bias from one sphere and introduce it into another. Remember that actual criteria should be relevant to and adequately cover the ultimate criterion — the concept of competent practice. If we should choose to bias our selection of criteria only to those that can be clearly specified in precise behavioral terms, we might gain reliability at the expense of relevancy.

Also, as previously pointed out, the specificity solution can operate against considerations of practicality. Highly specific objectives tend to be just that and thus not very broad in their scope. If we are to cover all that is required within the concept of competent practice, we are likely to have to make some concessions *vis-à-vis* specificity or else end up with a very large collection of objectives. One could, of course, sample from a relatively large collection of objectives and derive a practical number to evaluate. However, if these objectives also determine the content of training, as proposed by the advocates of competency-based education, one would be teaching to a sample rather than to the full complement of needed skills. One could argue, of course, that in practice one must always teach to a sample, but the implications of canonizing a certain small number of specific criteria or objectives as representing social work competence goes beyond what happens in an individual classroom. An alternative to choosing a sample of highly specific objectives is to yield somewhat in the quest for specificity and adopt objectives stated in more conceptual and inclusive terms.

Both approaches have their merit, and we do not propose to settle the issue here. Again, we would say that choices and trade-offs must be made; and we doubt that, given the present state of the art, one could confidently anoint any choice with the chrism of salvation.

Given that the quest for a well-defined collection of reliable, relevant, and practical criteria for effective practice remains largely unfulfilled, any attempt to develop a methodology for student assessment necessarily rests upon a shaky foundation. Nevertheless, the methodological considerations discussed above suggest, should we attempt to forge ahead, that we should conduct our assessment

in an environment that mirrors as closely as possible the context of subsequent practice.

TWO SOCIAL WORK ASSESSMENT APPROACHES

Two possibilities are the use of simulated practice situations and the direct assessment of actual work samples taken from the student's field experience. Each of these approaches has its advantages and disadvantages. Simulations provide an opportunity for ensuring that all assessees respond to the same situation, thus facilitating comparison between performances and allowing for the development of norms. The evaluation of responses can be keyed to the specifics of the simulated situation and hence scoring reliability is enhanced. Certain very real efficiencies can be realized through standardized administration and scoring. Goldstein reported that the narrative form of *The Manual for Use of the Tulane Assessment Scale for Caseworkers* can be scored in 15 minutes, and has a median inter-judge reliability of .77.¹⁸

There are also problems with simulations. The question of security remains a troublesome issue in a school environment. The student "grapevine" may quickly compromise the assumption that all students enter the assessment situation without foreknowledge of what is expected of them. It may be necessary to devise a whole library of simulations, each one requiring no mean expenditure of effort and ingenuity. But then the advantages of having each student perform in the same situation are lost, unless the equivalency of alternate situations can be established through careful psychometric investigation. There is also the question of whether simulated situations can approach in breadth and depth the complexities of actual practice situations. Admittedly, this question invites endless armchair theorizing, but it also invites empirical investigation of whether performance in a particular simulation can predict later performance in a practice situation.

While the author is not aware of predictive validity studies using simulations, several concurrent validity findings have been reported. Goldstein reported a median correlation of .28 when Tulane Assessment Scale scores were compared with supervisors' ratings of practicing caseworkers with MSW degrees. Validity findings with first- and second-year graduate students were even more disappointing, with a median correlation of .13 between test scores and field instructors' ratings being obtained in each case.¹⁹ Kadushin and Kelling obtained a correlation of .14 between scores on *The Tulane Assessment Scale* and scores on the Benjamin Rose Institute Interrupted Case Test, another simulation instrument, in a sample of social work grad-

uate students.²⁰ These data are not particularly encouraging, and leave us with the conclusion that the validity of simulated assessment situations still needs to be demonstrated.

Assessment based upon samples of practice, in the case of students presumably drawn from their field experience, provides a second methodology for evaluating social work skills. This procedure closely approximates the strategy that Mischel recommended as an optimal assessment methodology, namely, sampling directly from relevant criterion behavior. Here, issues of verisimilitude and a realistic level of complexity are dependent only upon appropriate selection of work samples.²¹

However the difficulties inherent in the work sample approach are substantial, as noted by Brennen in Chapter 8 of this book. This procedure is *ipso facto* idiosyncratic, that is, each assessee is dealing with a unique situation, and thus it is difficult to establish performance norms and assure the reliability of the judgments involved. Kadushin and Kelling reported mean interjudge reliabilities of .44 and .39 when they had tape recordings and typescripts of representative interviews, together with retrospective analyses, evaluated by five expert judges.²² These reliability data are as disappointing as the concurrent validity data from Goldstein's simulation test.

Attempts to increase reliability via the precise specification of expected behavior are hampered by the diverse nature of the work samples being evaluated. Direct observation of the assessee is beset by problems of intrusiveness, confidentiality, and the very practical issue of scheduling, yet indirect assessment does tempt students to employ post hoc rationalizations for their decisions.

In Chapter 8 Brennen notes that the use of an independent assessment panel is expensive and may be redundant, given the field instructors' evaluation of the students' work.²³ Yet there are some distinct advantages to using assessors who are not directly associated with the students' field supervision, as will be pointed out below. The issue of redundancy does present a troubling paradox should we attempt to use field instructors' evaluations as a criterion in an attempt to establish concurrent validity. If the correlation between field instructors' ratings and assessment panel ratings is high, then the independent assessment is valid but redundant. If the correlation is relatively low, the independent assessment is no longer redundant, but does lack concurrent validity. Given the fact that at the present time we have no clear reason to conclude that either field instructor or assessment panel evaluations do a superior job of predicting future competence in practice, it seems reasonable to undertake a predictive validity investigation.

Thus the use of independent assessment of student work samples

may well have no other value than to provide a data base for determining the relationship between the two sources of evaluations, the predictive validity of each and the reliability of the judgments involved in evaluating samples of practice. Given the fact that students seldom receive multiple evaluations of identical aspects of field performance, the reliability — in the sense of interjudge reliability — of field instructor evaluations cannot be determined, while the reliability of the judgments of a multi-assessor panel can be determined.

In comparing simulation and work sample methodologies, several conjectures suggest themselves. Simulations tend to be expensive to derive but economical to administer, while work sample evaluations tend to have just the opposite characteristics. Experience with simulations suggests that this approach facilitates the achievement of acceptable levels of interjudge reliability, but concurrent and predictive validity remain open questions. While one can make a theoretical argument for the superior validity of the work sample approach, this conclusion has yet to be demonstrated, and the procedure appears to be troubled by problems of interjudge reliability.

For comparative purposes, the simulation and work sample approaches have been presented as distinct and mutually exclusive strategies. The fact is that much common ground exists between them, and there is no reason why both cannot be employed in a single assessment program.

In the next chapter we will outline the choices that we have made in developing an assessment procedure. Occasionally we will present a modest rationale for our decisions. Mostly we were guided by a desire to try to capitalize on some of the principles discussed above, but at the same time we had no choice but to maintain a healthy respect for what was possible and practical and what our faculty would tolerate. This last consideration was not a trivial one.

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20. Alfred Kadushin and George Kelling, "Final Report: An Innovative Program in Social Work Education, the 3-2 Program," mimeographed (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin School of Social Work, 1973).
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Chapter 4

The Assessment Procedure

by DAVID E. CUMMINS

This chapter will describe our efforts to assess the practice skills of baccalaureate social work students at the University of Montana Department of Social Work. We view our present procedure not as an end product, but rather as a first step in an evolving investigation into methods of evaluating social work competence. Our goal is to provide some measure of quality control over the products of our program and over the program itself.

We felt strongly that this goal called for the implementation of some form of assessment program at the earliest possible opportunity. Thus our early decisions had a decidedly pragmatic air about them. We sought a working definition of social work practice, even though we recognized that there is limited consensus within the field con-

cerning just what kind of activities fall within the domain of practice. We implemented an assessment program in the form of a summative panel evaluation of specimens of practice taken from each student's practicum setting. This evaluation took the form of a written and oral exam administered when the student had completed or was just completing the practicum assignment.

We first attempted such an evaluation in the fall of 1973, and it took the form of a two-hour oral exam. We modified and refined the procedure as we gained experience and now rely heavily upon written documentation of practice competence, supplemented by a one-hour oral exam whose purpose is to clarify unresolved issues.

What we gained was a nearly instantaneous evaluation program, but we did not do so without paying a price — or perhaps more accurately, without the students paying a price. One has only to talk with the students who were first exposed to our competence examination procedure to obtain rather eloquent descriptions of the panic that most of them felt as they faced this make-or-break evaluation of their practice skills. These students did not have years to prepare themselves for the prospect of a summative exam, nor did they have the benefit of a curriculum that was specifically oriented toward the development of the competencies that the exam evaluated. Nevertheless, on the balance, we felt that the urgent need for assuring minimal levels of practice competence justified not only the imposition upon the students but also the extensive investment of time and effort that the procedure demanded of the faculty.

Our commitment to early implementation did not, however, tempt us to bypass the fundamental issue of defining a criteria base for our assessment program. We did attempt to determine what we wanted to measure before we set about trying to measure it. The alternative of allowing a particular measurement instrument define by default the criteria for evaluation would have left us in the precarious position of resting the fate of the entire assessment effort on the practicality, reliability, and validity of the instrument chosen. To avoid this we sought an instrument-independent statement of what we wanted to assess.

In our case what we wanted to assess, in the language of the Council on Social Work Education, was preparation for beginning social work practice. But this broadly stated objective immediately presented us with the task of defining just what social work practice is. One way of proceeding would have been to conduct a thorough job analysis of the practice activities of baccalaureate social workers in a wide variety of settings. However, we had neither the time nor the resources to undertake such a task. As an alternative, we reviewed a number of field assessment inventories and statements of curriculum

objectives, each of which provided a collection of descriptions of what a social worker does. In addition to learning objectives developed by our own faculty,¹ we surveyed the Schubert assessment instrument, the University of Chicago performance standards document, the Michigan Skill Assessment Instrument, and statements of curriculum objectives from West Virginia University and the University of Calgary. We also reviewed the National Association of Social Workers' report prepared by the Committee on the Study of Competence and a Southern Regional Education Board document.²

This undertaking provided us with such a large number of statements about what a social worker should be able to do that the focus of our efforts shifted from the issue of definition to the issue of organizing or cataloging the diverse descriptors of social work activities into a coherent framework. As a framework for accomplishing this, we were attracted to Boehm's conceptualization of four core activities of social work that apply across the traditional methods of casework, groupwork, community organization, administration, and research. He viewed social work as having problem-solving functions and he identified the four core activities as: (1) assessing the problem, (2) planning for the solution of the problem, (3) implementing the plan, and (4) evaluating the outcome. Boehm presented this categorization of social work activities within a broader context of a fusion of knowledge with social work values and the expression of this synthesis in professionally relevant activity. Yet he appeared to hold, as we do, that professional skill is expressed in the social worker's activities.³

We attempted to subsume our collection of social work activities under Boehm's problem-solving steps and found that the majority of them fit quite nicely, but there were some issues that seemed to transcend this categorization. Recognition of the organizational, community, and professional context of the problem-solving effort appeared to us to be critically important and furthermore to be what distinguished the activities of social workers from those of other professionals. While it is true that concerns such as knowledge of the community and its values, and knowledge of social welfare policy and services will be reflected in social workers' problem-solving activities, these contextual issues seem to pervade all elements of the problem-solving process and can be assessed adequately only by obtaining access to an extensive sample of practice activities. It appeared to us that such knowledge could be assessed more efficiently by direct evaluation. Hence we chose to retreat slightly from our intent to assess knowledge and values only as they were reflected in practice activities, and we added three additional categories to our four problem-solving functions: the organizational context of practice, the

community context of practice, and the professional context of practice.

COMPETENCE CRITERIA

This revised categorization seemed to organize adequately the collection of social work skills that we had amassed. We then proceeded to synthesize this collection of skills into a concise list of competence criteria. The list has undergone some modification and will undoubtedly undergo more. But for now, it stands as our working definition of social work practice skills and the criteria base for our assessment effort.

1. The Organizational Context of Practice.
 - a. Knowledge of the agency — the student worker should be able to:
 - (1) explain the purpose of the agency.
 - (2) demonstrate working knowledge of agency policies and procedures.
 - (3) identify services provided, and state limitations of service.
 - b. The agency as an organization — the student worker should be able to:
 - (1) specify how the organizational goals, structures, technology, and environment of the agency condition and shape the services provided.
 - (2) specify how the agency obtains its funding and identify the influence of sources of income upon agency policies and operation.
 - (3) understand the effect of hierarchical structure, task distribution, and staff contingencies upon the functioning of the agency.
 - (4) identify and evaluate both formal and informal channels of communication within the agency.
 - c. Representing the agency — the student worker should be able to:
 - (1) represent the agency and its services positively.
 - (2) give accurate information about eligibility for and availability of services.
 - (3) help client establish eligibility for services when appropriate.
 - (4) use policy and procedures flexibly without violating agency standards of practice.

- (5) see self clearly as a channel through which services reach the client.
 - (6) demonstrate congruence between one's own activities and overall agency purpose.
2. The Community Context of Practice.
 - a. Characteristics of the community — the student worker should be able to:
 - (1) demonstrate awareness of the unique social characteristics of the community and the region.
 - (2) identify the sociocultural, economic, and political influences upon social structure within the community.
 - (3) specify the particular segment of the community which is the target of the worker's practice.
 - b. Awareness of community needs and concerns — the student worker should be able to:
 - (1) demonstrate an understanding of the effects of socioeconomic, cultural, ethnic, sex, and age differences upon the concerns of individuals within the community.
 - (2) assess the social needs of that portion of the community which is of direct concern to the worker.
 - (3) given specific problems, identify the relationship between private troubles and broader community issues.
 - c. Assessment of existing social policy and programs — the student worker should be able to:
 - (1) identify the major social policies and other means employed to deal with community concerns.
 - (2) analyze these social policies and assess their impact upon the issues involved.
 - (3) identify gaps in existing policy and/or social programs.
 - (4) advocate for policies and programs to fulfill unmet needs.
 - d. Knowledge of formal and informal resource networks — the student worker should be able to:
 - (1) identify formal social service resources that are relevant to the worker's practice.
 - (2) provide accurate information concerning eligibility for and availability of services provided by these agencies.
 - (3) locate individuals, groups, and organizations that can serve as resources yet lie outside the formal social service network.
 - (4) identify the resources used most often by the segment of the community of direct concern to the worker.
 - e. Utilization of community resources — the student worker should be able to:

- (1) serve as a link between people and resource systems.
 - (2) follow required procedures in making referrals to formal agencies.
 - (3) justify referral based upon limitations of service in own agency and capabilities of resources to which client is referred.
 - (4) handle formal and informal referrals with a high degree of understanding of client's needs, capacities, and readiness.
 - (5) provide follow-up after referral and continuing support and service whenever appropriate.
3. Problem Identification and Assessment.
- a. Definition of the problem — the student worker should be able to:
 - (1) identify all individuals and/or groups involved in the problem.
 - (2) delineate the domain of the problem situation, that is, where it does and does not occur.
 - (3) delineate the frequency of the problem, that is, when it does and does not occur.
 - (4) summarize the essential characteristics of the presenting situation.
 - (5) determine whether other professions, organizations, or persons should be involved or assume responsibility.
 - b. Data collection techniques — the student worker should be able to:
 - (1) obtain the information necessary for an adequate assessment, including information that is not readily available.
 - (2) obtain multiple perspectives upon the same problem situation whenever possible.
 - (3) encourage specificity when seeking information.
 - (4) conduct effective interviews, maintaining purpose and focus without obstructing expression.
 - c. Analysis of information collected — the student worker should be able to:
 - (1) identify discrepancies among the perceptions and interests of the various parties to the problem situation.
 - (2) distinguish, when appropriate, between the seeker of change and the target of the change effort.
 - (3) relate relevant historical information to the current problem situation.
 - (4) assess the impact of existing social policy upon the problem under investigation.

- (5) justify any inferences drawn from the data, clearly distinguishing inference from fact.
- d. Interpretation of the problem environment — the student worker should be able to:
 - (1) perceive and articulate the effect of intrapersonal factors on the problem situation.
 - (2) perceive and articulate the effect of interpersonal factors on the problem situation.
 - (3) perceive and articulate the effect of the immediate environment on the problem situation.
 - (4) perceive and articulate the effect of community, cross-cultural, or societal issues on the problem situation.
4. Selection of an Intervention Plan.
 - a. Understanding of intervention models — the student worker should be able to:
 - (1) define and differentiate a number of relevant intervention models.
 - (2) provide a brief outline of the major concepts and methods espoused by each model.
 - (3) demonstrate familiarity with research evidence concerning the effectiveness and applicability of different intervention models.
 - (4) given specific problem situations, use research findings to predict probability results of various intervention approaches.
 - b. Establishment of objectives — the student worker should be able to:
 - (1) assist client in identifying needs.
 - (2) encourage client to assess capabilities and assets.
 - (3) assess the capabilities of the worker, the agency, and other resources that can be brought to bear upon the problem.
 - (4) cooperatively establish goals for change with the client.
 - (5) state objectives in clear and specific terms to facilitate later evaluation of results.
 - c. Specification of the plan — the student worker should be able to:
 - (1) provide a clear statement of the chosen intervention strategy.
 - (2) identify the model or models that underlie the strategy.
 - (3) demonstrate how the plan selected makes use of the methods and techniques espoused by the intervention model.
 - (4) relate plan to the individualized needs and capabilities of the parties involved.

- d. Rationale for the plan — the student worker should be able to:
 - (1) specify the advantages of the chosen plan over other possible alternatives.
 - (2) suggest how the chosen plan will maximize the probability of achieving the stated goals of the change effort.
 - (3) demonstrate the feasibility of the chosen strategy given the particulars of the problem situation.
 - (4) support choice with relevant and applicable research evidence.
- 5. Implementation of the Intervention Plan.
 - a. The intervention contract — the student worker should be able to:
 - (1) identify the expectations of all parties involved.
 - (2) negotiate a contract that conveys respective obligations and responsibilities.
 - (3) establish a clear understanding concerning the limits of the responsibility and advocacy of the worker in the change effort.
 - b. Mobilization of resources — the student worker should be able to:
 - (1) engage client's participation and enhance motivation for change.
 - (2) encourage optimism and confidence in client's own capabilities.
 - (3) engage the participation of other individuals who are essential to the success of the intervention plan.
 - (4) facilitate cooperation among all resources involved in the change effort.
 - c. Use of appropriate intervention techniques — the student worker should be able to:
 - (1) employ worker-client relationship issues in the service of problem resolution.
 - (2) assist client to understand problem and consider previously ignored alternatives.
 - (3) teach skills required for constructive response to the problem situation.
 - (4) confront and challenge client when appropriate.
 - (5) mediate conflict in the service of continued constructive efforts.
 - d. Reaction to the process of change — the student worker should be able to:
 - (1) maintain focus and purpose in the change effort.
 - (2) pace intervention process to client's capacity for change.
 - (3) capitalize on early successes with the aim of facilitating achievement of later objectives.

- (4) redirect service when it is misdirected or ineffective.
- e. Handling the disengagement — the student worker should be able to:

- (1) show considered judgment in the training of disengagement.
- (2) anticipate difficulties that are likely to arise during the transition period and prepare the parties involved for these difficulties.
- (3) disengage in a manner that promotes independent constructive action.

6. Evaluation and Feedback.

- a. Methodology for evaluation — the student worker should be able to:

- (1) design and use methods for outcome evaluation.
- (2) maintain detailed records in a format that facilitates evaluation.
- (3) objectively assess level of goal attainment.
- (4) evaluate the short- and long term effects of the intervention.

- b. Feedback to self — the student worker should be able to:

- (1) use outcome data to evaluate one's own practice.
- (2) seek feedback from clients and colleagues.
- (3) modify practice behaviors as a result of feedback.

- c. Feedback to the agency — the student worker should be able to:

- (1) assess congruence between stated agency purposes and actual patterns of practice.
- (2) suggest changes in policies and procedures that would allow more effective service.
- (3) provide agency with the client's perspective of the agency-client interface.

- d. Feedback to the intervention model — the student worker should be able to:

- (1) assess the effectiveness of the approach and methods espoused by the model with regard to a specific intervention.
- (2) use outcome data to refine one's own judgment concerning the generality and applicability of the model.

- e. Feedback to the community and to social policy — the student worker should be able to:

- (1) assess adequacy of existing community services in relation to a specific problem situation.
- (2) identify specific societal influences that tended to help or hinder problem resolution.

- (3) contribute to the development of social policy by interpreting to the community the relationship between private troubles and public issues.
7. The Professional Context of Practice.
 - a. Knowledge of the profession — the student worker should be able to:
 - (1) provide a working definition of social work as a profession.
 - (2) relate one's own activities to the profession of social work.
 - (3) discriminate the orientation, role, and activities of social workers from those of other professionals.
 - b. Handling of work expectations — the student worker should be able to:
 - (1) meet agency standards with regard to absences, appointments, meetings, deadlines, and so on.
 - (2) record with clarity and a sense of accountability.
 - (3) organize and use time productively.
 - (4) set appropriate priorities in the face of conflicting demands.
 - c. Use of supervision — the student worker should be able to:
 - (1) use supervision to examine own practice without undue defensiveness.
 - (2) identify those areas where supervisory help is especially needed.
 - (3) apply what was learned in one case or situation to subsequent situations.
 - (4) demonstrate an increasing capacity for independent practice as skills improve.
 - d. Integration of the professional role — the student worker should be able to:
 - (1) convey a sense of reliability and responsibility in dealings with clients and colleagues.
 - (2) initiate and maintain relationships with clients appropriate to the helping role selected.
 - (3) be supportive and empathetic with clients without over-identification.
 - (4) formulate a statement of one's own personal and role limits in the practice of social work.
 - (5) demonstrate persistence, flexibility, and creativeness in responding to the difficulties and frustrations of practice.
 - (6) demonstrate an awareness and understanding of one's own characteristic patterns of behavior.

- (7) demonstrate a commitment to the values and ethics of social work.
- e. Commitment to continued professional growth — the student worker should be able to:
 - (1) use available resources to improve knowledge and skills.
 - (2) show capacity for and interest in keeping abreast of current literature and developments within the field.

Clearly, this list of competencies does not achieve the level of behavioral specificity recommended by most competency-based education advocates. We have a long way to go before we can claim that the determination of whether a student has achieved competence vis-à-vis one of the statements above is a matter of simple observation and recording. To some extent, the generality of the present objectives is an outgrowth of our decision to maintain a generic definition of practice skills that is independent of whether the target of the social worker's efforts is an individual, a group, or a complex organization. On the positive side, our criteria list is of reasonable length and seems well-suited to the level of specificity that can be handled easily in a summative exam. The list does provide the reader with some idea of what we mean when we say, for example, problem identification and assessment. We do envision the inclusion of additional levels of subobjectives as we seek to use this criteria base as a foundation for our instructional program.

As with any attempt to lend organization to a highly diverse and complex collection of work activities, our categorization reflects a number of arbitrary decisions. We subsumed the activity of linking people with resource systems under the heading of the community context of practice, but it also could have been included under the category of implementation of the intervention plan. We included the issue of specification of professional role limits under the heading of the professional context of practice, when it just as suitably might have been considered an aspect of intervention planning or implementation. In general, if concerns of issues or skills seemed to pervade all elements of the problem-solving process, we chose to consider them as contextual concerns.

We attempted to keep the four problem-solving steps focused as directly as possible upon a rational cause and effect model. While we realize that this approach tends to impose a framework of clean rationality and ordered sequence upon social work practice activities that are seldom so neatly structured, the imposition does not appear so confining that it prohibits an accurate portrayal of the dynamics of social work intervention. It does tend to encourage students to think about what they are doing and why they are doing it, and that is not something we regret.

Our categorization is original only in its organizational structure. Yet it provides a perspective that we have found extremely useful in our attempts to develop an assessment program. It is not, at this point, highly specific in terms of behavioral referents, but it does take us farther along the path toward the goal of specifying what we mean when we talk about social work practice skills. Whether our criteria are specific enough and unambiguous enough to serve as a basis for assessment of practice skills can be determined best by observing whether acceptable levels of interjudge reliability result from a measurement instrument that is based upon these criteria.

THE MONTANA SOCIAL WORK COMPETENCE SCALE

The assessment methodology that we selected grew rather directly from our delineation of practice skills. Because of the relative ease with which it could be implemented, we chose to adopt a work sample approach and to assess student competence as demonstrated within the practicum assignment. For each student an assessment panel was assigned, consisting of faculty members who were not involved in the student's field supervision. While we would have preferred to have the panel directly observe the student's practicum work, such a procedure was not feasible. Issues of scheduling, the remoteness of some settings, and intrusiveness appeared to present insurmountable problems in a number of settings. Therefore we decided to rely on students' descriptions of their practicum work.

As mentioned previously, the form and content of the exam evolved over a period of two years. Here we will only describe the current procedure. A report by Johnson, Watson, and Cantrell presented a thorough description of the earlier versions of the exam.⁴

The Montana Social Work Competence Scale consists of ten identified topic areas and an optional, open-ended eleventh item that provides students with a guide for organizing their written demonstration of social work competence. The topics are derived from our competence criteria, although the mapping from the criteria categories to exam items is not one to one. The exam is designed to provide a framework for students to describe their field activities. We request that written responses be supplemented by case records, reports, letters, statistical data, and anything else that could corroborate the students' description of their activities. Four of the ten items essentially elicit a written case presentation, although the "case" may represent service addressed to a group, community, or social issue as well as to an individual. The text of the exam is as follows:

1. *The organizational context of practice.* Identify your practicum agency. Describe the purpose and goals of the

agency, and the services provided. Are there significant limitations to the service the agency can provide? How is eligibility for service determined? Indicate, via specific examples, how the policies and established procedures of your agency influenced your activities and the services you were able to provide.

2. *The community context of practice.* Describe the community context of your practicum experience. Were your services directed toward any specific subgroup or special social problem within the community? Are there unique characteristics of the region, community, or segment of the community which have particular relevance to your practice? What are the predominant problems, issues, and concerns of the people you were serving? To what degree were these concerns a function of broader community or social issues?
3. *Assessment of existing social policy.* Identify the major social policies and programs which affect the concerns of the population you were serving. Assess the impact of these policies upon the problems in question. If existing social policy is not adequate, describe what is needed and indicate how you, your agency, and other resources have attempted to address the need for new or revised social policy and programs.
4. *Utilization of community resources.* Describe the formal and informal social resource networks within the community which were relevant to your practice. Include a description of at least three resources — these need not be restricted to formal social service agencies — whose services were particularly relevant to your activities. Describe a specific episode in which you served as a link between a client, group, or community and a community resource. Indicate why involvement outside your agency was appropriate, and detail your activities in establishing the linkage.

NOTE: Questions five through eight are to be answered by referring to a specific episode of service which you provided. This episode need not be restricted to service rendered an individual client. Descriptions of attempts to intervene with groups, the community, or a specific social problem within the community are encouraged.

5. *Problem identification and assessment.* Describe the episode of service — who? what? when? How did you become involved? Who requested service? Who was the target of the desired service? What exactly was the presenting problem, and who perceived the situation as a problem? What additional information did you seek, and how did you go about obtaining it? What was your conceptualization of the problem, and did it differ in any way from the conceptualization of others involved?

6. *Selection of an intervention plan.* How did you synthesize the information you obtained into a coherent intervention plan? Outline your plan explicitly. What were the objectives of your intervention, and how were they determined? Identify the model (or theory) that underlies your plan. Provide a brief outline of the major concepts and methods espoused by the model. Explain why you chose this model rather than others. What are the research findings concerning the efficacy and applicability of the model? How did these research findings affect your choice?
7. *Implementation of the plan.* What exactly did you do in carrying out your plan? What efforts were required to engage and maintain the active participation of those involved? What was the explicit or implicit contract that determined the respective expectations and responsibilities of everyone involved in the change effort? What specific techniques did you employ to facilitate constructive change? What difficulties arose, and how did you deal with them? How was disengagement handled?
8. *Evaluation and feedback.* Evaluate the effectiveness of your intervention with regard to immediate and long-term effects. To what extent were your objectives accomplished? What procedures did you employ to assess the overall effectiveness of your efforts? How can you use this experience to further enhance your own skills? Did your experience strengthen or weaken in any way your appreciation of the model upon which you based your intervention?
9. *Feedback to the agency.* Use your practicum experience to analyze the effectiveness of your agency. To what extent were the services that you provided congruent with the stated purpose of the agency? (You may want to refer your answer to Question 1.) How effective is the current program of agency service? Which policies and procedures are viable, and which might be changed in order to aid more effectively in the problem-solving process?
10. *The professional context of practice.* How can the services you provided during your practicum be justified as social work? What distinguished your role and your activities from those of other professionals? What personal and role limits did you establish in dealing with clients and why? Can you identify the effects of your own attitudes, values, and characteristic patterns of behavior upon your activities as a social work practitioner?
11. *Potpourri* — *This question is optional and will be evaluated only in the sense that it may provide for a more thorough understanding of previous answers.* Please use this last question to relate anything at all that might help the reader of your examination to reach a more complete appreciation of your practicum experience. Was there an experience or a perspective that was particularly meaningful to you, something that Questions 1 through 10 did not elicit?

The written portion of the exam is supplemented by a subsequent oral exam, where issues that remain in doubt can be clarified. Our early assessment efforts relied almost exclusively upon the student's oral presentation, but we found that we were unable to ensure thorough coverage of all competence areas in an oral exam. We gradually shifted our emphasis to the evaluation of the written materials that the student submitted and gave supplementary status to the oral exam and restricted its length to one hour.

The two faculty examiners read the written materials and independently complete a rating form that provides a scale for each of the ten questions. The rating scale provides a range from 1 — "a clearly inferior answer," to 5 — "a clearly superior answer." The mid-point is labeled "an adequate answer." The interval descriptors are primitive, but it was felt that any attempt to provide more specific descriptive anchors to the rating scales for these multifaceted questions would either oversimplify what was being assessed or prove to be exceedingly cumbersome. The present "inferior" to "superior" notation seems to reflect honestly the fact that rather global judgments are called for. Instructions to the students and the examiner's rating form appear in Appendixes A and B respectively.

When the oral exam is conducted, the examiners have an opportunity to explore questionable areas and change their initial ratings up or down on the basis of what transpires. Even during the oral, the examiners are asked to keep their ratings independent of each other. Our aim, of course, is to determine the interjudge reliability of the two ratings.

At the conclusion of the oral exam, the student is assigned an average rating for each of the ten questions and an overall performance rating obtained by further averaging over all ten questions. This overall rating is used in conjunction with the field instructor's evaluation to determine a grade for the practicum.

We view the threshold for determining minimal acceptable performance on the exam as something that we can experiment with as we gain experience. We do, however, state the criteria for receiving a passing evaluation before each group of students faces the exam. At the present time we have adopted the rule that any student who receives a "clearly inferior" rating from both examiners on any item fails the exam, as does a student who receives an overall rating of two or less on the five-point scale. Students who fail the exam may be given an opportunity to submit revised material based upon the original practicum experience, or may be required to undertake a new practicum. This decision is made by the members of the assessment panel and the departmental chairman.

A STUDENT EXAMPLE

What follows are selected excerpts from the exam of one student, which are presented in an attempt to provide the reader with some feeling for the process involved in conducting the assessment. Hopefully it demonstrates how a student's written materials provide the springboard for an oral exam that is not necessarily comprehensive, but instead tends to focus upon those areas with regard to which the examiners feel the student has not clearly demonstrated competence. Given this orientation, the material and comments presented below necessarily provide a negatively biased sample of the student's performance. This student received an overall rating of 3.5 on a 5-point scale, and as we shall see in the next chapter, this is very close to the mean rating for all examinees.

The student served full time for a period of three months in a comprehensive community mental health center located some distance from Missoula. She spent the majority of her time doing outreach work with clients of the center under the supervision of a certified psychiatric social worker who had primary responsibility for outreach activities.

Remember that the examiners come to the oral exam having read and evaluated the student's written materials, which must be organized around the ten topic areas. The first issue raised by the two faculty examiners was related to the student's response to Question 2. They expressed concern that the student had not addressed herself to the extent of mental health problems within the community and the region, nor had she attempted to determine whether such problems occurred more frequently within certain identifiable subgroups. Therefore they sought to ascertain whether the student was aware of the base rate of occurrence of the types of problems with which she dealt.

With regard to Question 4, the examiners asked for more specific information concerning the referral episode described by the student in the following excerpt.

A specific episode in which I served as a link between a client and this agency (Vocational Rehabilitation) is in the case of a woman who is on the borderline of mental retardation, has a tendency to abuse drugs, on ADC, has three children, and is receiving counseling, and OT. She was particularly interested in beauty school but did not know where to go to get the training and couldn't afford it, if there was a charge, so I contacted Vocational Rehabilitation for her and got her an appointment. The woman had no means of transportation so I took her down and picked her up and made sure she had the necessary forms filled out and tests completed.

Involvement was necessary outside my agency because the

woman apparently wanted training, but had no means of achieving it, and our agency could not offer her the appropriate resources, so I felt referral to this agency was in order. Further the woman did have a mental disability which was a handicap to employment, and did have a desire to obtain some training and eventually work.

The examiners asked the student to describe her activities in following up the initial referral. They further asked her to present her own assessment of the client's skills and liabilities and to provide an opinion regarding whether beauty school training was a realistic goal for this individual to pursue.

The student answered Questions 5 through 8 by describing an episode of service in which she dealt with a 12-year-old boy who was brought to the attention of the mental health center by his parents. The boy had a history of stealing, running away, and poor academic and social adjustment at school. Initial contact with the family was accomplished by the student's supervisor, who after some initial evaluation felt that the relationship between the parents and the boy was highly dysfunctional, having degenerated over a period of time to a current pattern of mutual antagonism. The supervisor decided to work with the parents and asked the student to work with the boy in attempting to establish some activities and friends outside of the family environment. The student provided the following statement of her objectives in working with the boy.

1. I wanted him to know that not all women or adults would respond to him as his parents do. I tried to do this by first of all accepting the child as he was. I tried not to criticize him or lose my temper with him. I tried to let him more or less run the show, within certain limits, of course. I tried to create an environment of tolerance and acceptance.
2. I also wanted to give him practice in communication, because at home he was confronted with a somewhat mixed-up communication pattern. Also the boy was, like the parents, very isolated so he never really had much chance to deal with or communicate with people.
3. I also tried in working with this boy to give him practice socializing; that is, I tried to give him a chance to practice forming relationships with other people. (This was another reason for the swimming lessons.)

The examiners first attempted to determine whether the student had played a significant part in assessing the problem situation or instead had operated upon the conclusions of her supervisor. They asked the student to describe her assessment activities and to specify exactly how her own assessment had influenced the goals and strategies of her intervention efforts. The examiners further sought to determine how the student viewed the issue of self-determination, given

her stated objectives and the additional information that the boy had made several attempts to elicit the student's support in defying his mother.

The student provided the following in response to Question 8:

I feel as though it is a little hard for me to evaluate the effectiveness of my intervention since I feel the real results from my action will probably not show up till later. That is, I feel as though my stay at the center was too short for me to observe any real earth-shaking results in regard to this case. However, I do feel that if someone continues working with the child as I have done and makes adjustments to meet the problems and improvements that come about, then maybe in a longer period some more pronounced results could be observed.

However I do feel that what I am trying to do or have done is not in vain, because it will be incorporated into both the boy's and the parents' repertoire of experiences and will for this reason have an effect on them, as all things do with all people. I also feel that some shorter-term effects could be seen. For example, the boy seems to be loosening up quite a bit around people. That is, with my field supervisor and myself he seems to be relaxing and has started to open up more. This type of evaluation can be seen from observation of behavior before and after intervention.

Another effect of my intervention, in terms of change of behavior was approximately one week before I was to leave, the boy called my field supervisor and asked for an appointment. He said that he had a problem with his mother and wanted to talk about it. (The mother was with him when he called.) When the boy came in he explained that he knew he was purposely bugging his mother, by asking "stupid questions" and that he wanted to try to stop. This was a very big step for the boy, because never before had he acknowledged that there was a problem and that he may be partly to blame for it. (The boy was to go to camp the following week and therefore any further intervention on my part with the boy would not be possible since I would be gone when he got back.)

The examiners noted that the student had failed to refer to her original objectives for the intervention — what she wanted the boy to be able to do. They asked her to attempt to go beyond anecdotal data, however encouraging, to assess the extent to which she had accomplished what she set out to do. The issue was explored at some length.

Question 9 asks the student to use the practicum experience to provide feedback to the agency. This particular student began her response with:

In trying to analyze the effectiveness of my agency, I must do so in terms of the fact that the agency is still relatively new and is in a state of expansion, in regard to both staff and pro-

gramming. For example, about a year ago there were only four members on the staff here. At that time there was no outreach staff, no day treatment, no VISTA workers, no business manager, and little in the way of mental health programming. Keeping this in mind, it can be seen that the effectiveness of the agency has been greatly increased.

The committee strongly challenged the student's assumption that agency effectiveness can be equated with or estimated by expansion or size. They again noted that the student did not refer to criteria for agency effectiveness. In particular, she failed to refer to her own description in Question 1 of what the agency was supposed to do. When she replied that one objective of her agency was to keep people out of the state mental hospital whenever possible, she was asked if she were aware of commitment rates before and after the introduction of community mental health services. She was also asked if she were aware of any evaluation — from any source — concerning how well the agency was doing its job. The examiners noted the student's implicit assumption that mental health services were *ipso facto* a valuable undertaking, and they attempted to discover whether the student was familiar with the opinion of some individuals that such services may do as much harm as good.

The above description represents a summary of the response of one assessment panel to one student's written materials. Again, it should be emphasized that the student's accomplishments received little attention in the oral exam, at least until the final moments when she was given feedback on all areas of the exam.

As stated earlier, it is hoped that this example will add a bit of flesh to the procedural skeleton outlined in the first part of the chapter. This assessment procedure continues to be in a process of evolution and refinement. Before discussing our plans for enhancing the present instrument and for experimenting with completely new assessment procedures, it seems appropriate to present in the following chapter the results we have obtained from using the present version of the Montana Social Work Competence Scale.

NOTES

1. "Field Practicum Manual," mimeographed (Missoula, Mont: University of Montana Department of Social Work, 1973), pp. 16-18.
2. Margaret Schubert, *Assessment of Social Work Student Performance in Fieldwork* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1966); Eleanor Merrifield, Jan Linfield, and Edythe Jastram, *A Standard for Measuring the Minimum Acceptable Level of Performance in First-Year Fieldwork in Social Casework* (Chicago: University of Chicago School of Social Service Administration,

- 1964); University of Michigan School of Social Work, *Practice Skill Assessment Instrument* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Campus Publishers, 1967); "Curriculum Objectives, Skill Competencies and Knowledge Base for Professional Practice at the Bachelor's Level," mimeographed (Morgantown, West Va.: West Virginia University School of Social Work, 1973); "Statement of B.S.W. Curriculum Objectives," mimeographed (Calgary: University of Calgary Faculty of Social Welfare, 1973); Committee on the Study of Competence, *Guidelines for the Assessment of Professional Practice in Social Work* (New York: National Association of Social Workers, 1968); and Harold L. McPheeters, *A Core of Competence for Baccalaureate Social Welfare* (Atlanta: Southern Regional Education Board, 1971).
3. Werner W. Boehm, "The Nature of Social Work," *Social Work*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (April 1958), pp. 10-18.
 4. John C. Johnson, Adele Watson, and Michael Cantrell, "The First Year of a Practice Competence Examination for Baccalaureate Social Work Students," mimeographed (Missoula, Mont.: University of Montana, 1974).

Chapter 5

Examination Results, Spring Quarter 1975

by DAVID E. CUMMINS

The results presented here were obtained when the Montana Social Work Competence Scale (MSWCS) was administered to 31 social work seniors in the spring quarter of 1975. Previous versions of the exam were given to approximately 50 students, starting in the fall quarter of 1973. However the scale was changed substantially in the fall and winter of the 1974-75 academic year, and because of this it did not seem advisable to attempt to combine the data resulting from the exam described herein with the data produced by earlier versions. In general, the distribution of assessment scores and the interjudge reliability data have not changed markedly from one version of the exam to another.¹

Of the 31 students, 25 were female and 6 were male. The mean

grade point average for the group, computed over all coursework taken at the University of Montana, was 3.16 ($A = 4.0$), with a range of 2.1 to 3.9. Twenty-one were assigned concurrent field placements, spending one-third to one-half time in fieldwork for two or three quarters. Most of these students were also attending classes during the period. Ten were assigned block placements, spending one full quarter in field settings. All students took the exam in the final weeks of their field assignments.

They were given instructions for preparing their written documentation and a copy of the MSWCS approximately one month before the time the exams began. The typical length of the written materials was from 50 to 60 pages. The time spent in preparing these varied from 10 to over 60 hours.

Fourteen faculty members served as examiners, sitting on from two to six panels. The panel for each student consisted of two faculty members appointed by the chairman of the department, who made an effort to balance the panels in terms of typical styles of conducting the oral exam. Assignments were rotated in such a way that each panel was unique, that is, no two faculty members were empaneled together more than once. Six were engaged in field supervision, but they were excluded from the panel of any student whom they supervised.

Each of the examiners had some previous experience with earlier versions of the exam. Rater training for the spring 1975 exam was limited to a memo urging the examiners to avoid the halo effect and unnecessary restriction in the range of their ratings.

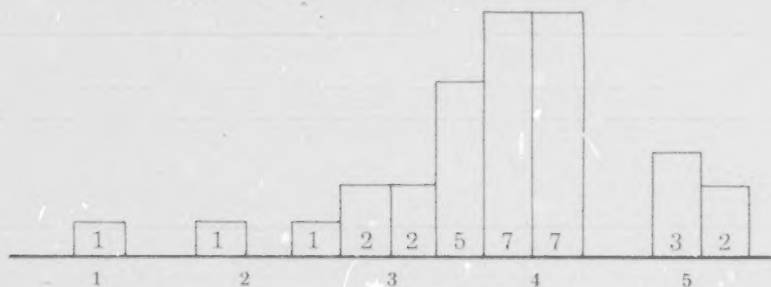
Faculty examiners typically devoted 4 to 6 hours to each exam, and hence the majority of them invested 20 to 30 hours in activities directly related to the exam. This represented an investment of approximately 300 hours for the department as a whole.

Remember that the responses to each of the ten competence areas identified by the MSWCS were evaluated using a single five-point scale ranging from a "clearly inferior answer" to a "clearly superior answer." The ratings, initially assigned on the basis of the student's written documentation, were then subject to modification if the performance in the oral exam warranted it.

In order to obtain a firm estimate of the interjudge reliability of this evaluation procedure, three additional judges were given the rather monumental task of evaluating all of the 31 exams.² Two of the judges held MSW degrees, and one held a BSW with an MS in rehabilitation counseling but none of them had extensive postdegree experience. Two of them had received their baccalaureate training at the University of Montana. None of the three had any experience with the exam prior to this assignment. Before beginning, they were

shown written materials and videotapes of two earlier exams, one representing a very good performance, the other a very poor performance. They read and evaluated the written documentation in the same manner as did the faculty examiners. They also viewed videotapes of the oral portion of the exam and were given an opportunity to modify their initial ratings. They differed from the faculty examiners only in that they could take no active part in the oral exam.

FIGURE 1
Distribution of Overall Examination Scores

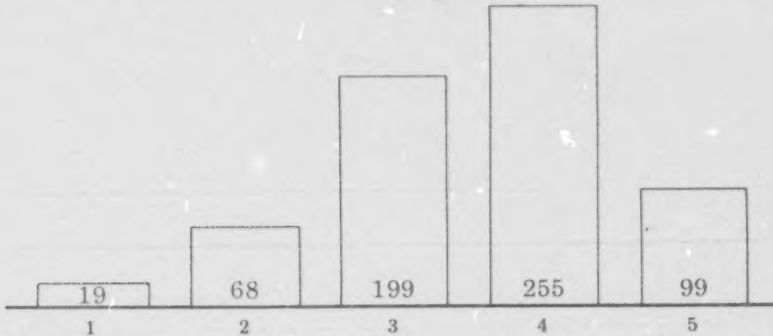


The distribution of overall ratings for the 31 students is given in Figure 1. For each item, a student was assigned the average of the two ratings given by the faculty examiners. An overall rating for the exam was obtained by averaging over the ten items. The ratings of the three additional reviewers were not used in determining the student's score of record on the exam and are not included in the data shown in Figure 1. The distribution is clearly skewed toward the "superior" end of the scale, but not so drastically as to prohibit discrimination among the highest rated students. Figure 2 shows the distribution of the 620 numerical ratings given by the faculty examiners, and indicates that a rating of four or five was much more likely than a rating of two or one. This distribution confirms the existence of a clear leniency effect, as does the mean overall rating of 3.56 obtained for the 31 students.

To some extent the leniency effect was exacerbated by the use of the oral exam to supplement the evaluations of the written materials. Twenty-seven percent of the initial ratings were modified, 20 percent in a favorable direction and 7 percent in an unfavorable direction. The mean overall rating of written materials prior to modification in the orals was 3.39.

The students who were assigned concurrent practicum assignments achieved a mean rating of 3.71, while the students with block placements achieved 3.24. The difference between the groups ap-

FIGURE 2
Distribution of Numerical Ratings Assigned for All Items



proached, but did not achieve, statistical significance at the .05 level ($t = 1.85$, $df = 29$, $p < .10$).

Given the format of the MSWCS and the global judgments required of the evaluators, the question of interjudge reliability became crucial. Typically, such reliability declined as the level of generality of the judgments required increased. As indicated above, each student received two ratings from a panel of two faculty examiners, and these were the only ones used in officially evaluating performance. The computation of a product-moment correlation between the two overall ratings for the 31 students was complicated by the fact that Examiner 1 and Examiner 2 were different for each student. The alternative of using an incomplete blocks analysis of variance design to analyze the effect of individual examiners upon examination scores was not feasible because several examiners sat on as few as two panels.

One could argue that the multivariate status of the two sources of ratings should have produced a product-moment correlation that was an underestimate of what might have been obtained if the same two raters had examined all students. On the other hand, one could maintain that a correlation computed under these circumstances was likely to be an overestimate of a normal interjudge correlation. The basis for such a claim would be that each pair of examiners experienced pressure to reach a consensus, yet the level of consensus would be different for each pair. In any case, we do have the ratings of three other judges who evaluated all students. It should be remembered, however, that these judges had no previous experience with the exam and were not able to take an active part in the oral portion.

In the absence of a better alternative, the ratings of Examiner 1,

the designated chairperson of each panel, and Examiner 2 were used as vectors of scores in the same manner as the ratings produced by the three other judges. The correlation matrix for the five sources of ratings is given in Table 1.

TABLE 1
Correlation Matrix for the
Five Sources of Overall Exam Ratings

	Examiner 1*	Examiner 2*	Reviewer 1	Reviewer 2	Reviewer 3
Examiner 1*	1.00	.86	.54	.66	.57
Examiner 2*		1.00	.61	.73	.67
Reviewer 1			1.00	.33	.44
Reviewer 2				1.00	.81
Reviewer 3					1.00

* Actually a multivariate source.

The correlations between the multivariate Examiners 1 and 2, and between Reviewers 2 and 3 were remarkably high, .86 and .81, respectively. Except for several low correlations for Reviewer 1, all correlations were within the range of respectability, given the character of the evaluations. The mean reliability coefficient for the ten pairings was .62. While this was not exceptionally high, it was considerably higher than the reliabilities in the high 30s and the low 40s reported by Kadushin and Kelling for work sample evaluations.³

As mentioned previously, each student's score on the exam was determined by the mean of the ratings of Examiners 1 and 2. The correlation between the means of the ratings of the three backup reviewers and those of Examiners 1 and 2 was .79, indicating that the two sources of evaluation approached the status of equivalent measures. The possibility that the .86 interjudge reliability coefficient, obtained from the faculty ratings, might be spuriously high led us to examine the equivalent statistic for the 23 students who took an earlier version of the MSWCS during the spring of 1974. It was only in the spring quarter that we had a reasonably large number of students taking the exam. The correlation for this earlier data, again computed over multiexaminer vectors of ratings, was .87.

Another cause for skepticism concerning the high reliability obtained from the faculty examiners was that their final ratings were not likely to be truly independent, given the fact that they jointly conducted the oral exam. An examiner could hardly avoid some impression of the other examiner's feelings toward the student. In order to investigate this proposition, we computed the correlation between

the faculty ratings assigned only on the basis of the written documentation. We obtained an r of .78, suggesting that there was some trend to consensus in the oral, but it did not account for a large proportion of the obtained consistency in ratings.

Given that there was reasonable consistency across the various sources of overall ratings, there was the additional question of whether the pattern of ratings *across* the ten questions showed similar consistency. The answer appeared to be *no*. A correlation coefficient could be computed for each student comparing the relationship of the ten-item ratings of each faculty examiner. In this situation we were no longer bothered by multivariate sources of data. The mean of the collection of 31-item pattern correlations was .29, indicating that there was some consistency in item rating patterns, but of a rather low order, accounting for less than 10 percent of the interitem variance.

What this suggested was that the individual items of the MSWCS did a better job of contributing to an overall rating of competence than they did in dissecting such competence into clearly identifiable components. It would have been interesting to examine the relationships among item scores via a factor analysis of the data, yet the low interitem reliabilities and an N of 31 made such an undertaking a dubious venture.

At this point nothing can be said about the predictive validity of the MSWCS. We intend to conduct a follow-up study to obtain assessments of job performance on each of the 31 students. The relationship between the MSWCS results and field supervisor ratings and the relationship between the MSWCS and student grade point averages were computed and are given in Table 2.

TABLE 2
Correlations Between MSWCS,
Field Supervisors' Ratings, and GPAs

	MSWCS	Overall Field Supervisor Rating	Field Supervisor Rating of Relationship Skills	GPA
MSWCS	1.00	.37	.32	.56
Overall Field Supervisor Rating		1.00	.84	.62
Field Supervisor Rating of Relationship Skills			1.00	.51
GPA				1.00

The question remains of whether to consider such correlations as indications of concurrent criterion validity, construct validity, or redundancy. In a sense they are all three, although the concern expressed in the previous chapter regarding using field supervisor ratings as a validity criterion for the MSWCS scores remains undiminished. Field instructors did submit an evaluation form closely keyed to the same ten topic areas covered in the MSWCS. A copy of this is shown in Appendix C. They were asked to consider the student's field performance as they saw it and to try to set aside anything they might know about the content and quality of the student's written preparation for the MSWCS. The correlation between the supervisors' overall ratings and the MSWCS scores was .37. This modest relationship does suggest that the MSWCS provides evaluations that are significantly related to but do not duplicate those given by the field instructors. On the other hand, one is left to speculate why the two sources of student evaluation are not more highly correlated.

There clearly are some areas, such as issues of relationship with clients, where the field supervisor should be in a better position to assess accurately the student's abilities. The present format of the MSWCS allows only an indirect assessment of such skills. This is one reason why both field supervisor ratings and the MSWCS are used in evaluating the students. The correlation of .56 between the MSWCS and student GPAs, looked at together with the considerably lower correlation of .32 between the MSWCS and supervisor ratings of relationship skills, might lead one to conclude that the MSWCS tends to do a better job of tapping cognitive skills than interpersonal skills. Although this may be a reasonable conjecture, nevertheless it is clouded by the fact that the field supervisor ratings of overall performance and relationship skills are correlated with GPAs at an equivalently high level. Apparently a student's GPA is a moderately good predictor of both MSWCS scores and field supervisor ratings.

Further speculation on the relationship between field supervisor ratings and MSWCS scores should probably be deferred in favor of more systematic investigation. One thing that can be said, however, is that MSWCS scores tend to be less lenient than the ratings of the field supervisors. The mean MSWCS score of 3.56 was significantly lower than the mean supervisor rating of 4.13 ($t = 4.23$, $df = 30$, $p < .01$).

The comparison of MSWCS scores and the supervisors' ratings brings us back to the issue of quality control. On the basis of his performance on the exam, one student was given a failing grade for the practicum. Yet his field supervisor had given him an overall rating of three on the five-point scale. The failing of only one student out of 31 may reflect favorably upon the skills of our students, or it may

indicate a reluctance on the part of the assessors to subject students to the trauma of failure. This issue will be discussed in the next chapter.

We will conclude this chapter by noting that the data reviewed here left us with the intention of continuing our efforts to assess practice competence. The present procedure appears to possess reasonable reliability and to serve an evaluative function that is significantly more critical than that provided by field supervisors' ratings. Thus it shows promise of attaining some viability as an instrument for achieving quality control in social work practice. It does, however, have serious shortcomings, and some of these appear to be endemic to our choice of assessment methodology. A discussion of these shortcomings is the topic of the next chapter.

NOTES

1. Data resulting from the administration of earlier versions of the MSWCS are presented in John C. Johnson, Adele Watson, and Michael Cantrell, "The First Year of a Practice Competence Examination for Baccalaureate Social Work Students," mimeographed (Missoula, Mont.: University of Montana, 1974).
2. The procedure of using a separate team of raters was suggested by Maureen Ullrich, School of Business Administration, University of Montana, Missoula.
3. Alfred Kadushin and George Kelling, "Final Report: An Innovative Program in Social Work Education, the 3-2 Program," mimeographed (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin School of Social Work, 1973).

Chapter 6

Limitations of Our Assessment Procedures

by DAVID E. CUMMINS

As we review our present assessment program, we become especially aware of the fact that we have taken only a first step in our quest for quality control in social work education. While we are reaping some very real benefits from what we have accomplished, the experience of conducting the program has made its many shortcomings all too obvious. Not surprisingly, the most fertile sources of insight into the assets and liabilities of the current assessment procedure have been the individuals who have experienced it either as assessors or assessees — the faculty and students.

On the positive side of the ledger, the MSWCS is providing us with a detailed look at the products of our program. This alone has proven an extremely valuable — if not always comforting — source of

feedback concerning our educational efforts. We are confronted with a wide range of performances on the exam, and we are left to consider to what degree those who do poorly have been cheated by teaching that was not responsive to their needs. We are also confronted with disappointing performances by a large percentage of the students with regard to specific areas of competence, which provides clear evidence of deficiencies in the curriculum. This kind of feedback, as well as a commitment to compatibility between what we teach and what we evaluate, has motivated a far-reaching review and redesign of the curriculum, which is discussed in detail in Chapter 7.

Another very real advantage of the MSWCS is that it provides us — precisely because it is operational and does serve as a means of monitoring the competence of our BA candidates — breathing room to experiment with modifications of our present procedure and to explore completely different measurement approaches to the assessment of social work competence. As indicated in the previous chapter, the judgments elicited by the MSWCS have reasonable, if not overwhelming, consistency, and these reliability data provide a benchmark against which we can compare other approaches.

The shortcomings of the MSWCS appear to be both a function of our selection of criteria for social work practice competence, and a function of our choice of a work sample methodology for obtaining a measure of that competence. As pointed out in Chapter 3, any finite collection of criteria will only approximate the ultimate ideal of competent practice, and furthermore, any reasonable measurement instrument will only sample from the domain of skills identified by the finite set of criteria. The question, then, of just how adequately the MSWCS covers the domain of practice remains a troublesome one.

We have chosen a set of criteria that conceptualizes practice as a rational problem-solving endeavor, and we have further emphasized the use of intervention models as a basis for decision making. Both of these choices suggest a focus upon the rational or cognitive aspect of practice. The moderately high correlation between MSWCS ratings and grade point averages further indicates that our assessment tends to emphasize cognitive abilities. While the exam does not completely ignore worker-client relationship issues, such issues do not receive the attention accorded to cognitive abilities. The structure of the exam, involving as it does retrospective reporting rather than direct observation, also tends to impede the accurate assessment of relationship skills. We would like to do a better job of providing a structure for evaluating interpersonal relationship skills within the context of our assessment, although at the same time we are concerned about the subjectivity involved in making judgments on such matters.

An issue related to our emphasis on cognitive matters is our as-

sumption that students should be able to adopt an intervention model as a basis for their intervention activities. A strong case can be made that the state of the art within the field of social work intervention does not justify the insistence that clinical decisions be based upon some clearly articulated intervention model. It occurred to us that the rational cause-and-effect model that underlies our exam may impose an ill-fitting and rather academic perspective upon the realities and vicissitudes of practice. Several of our faculty have suggested that the format of the exam may induce students to avoid conceptualizing practice in unconventional and creative ways. Certainly not all practice is characterized by a time-extended sequence of assessment, planning, intervention, and evaluation.

One solution to all these issues of examination focus is to keep the structure of the exam general enough to cover the widest possible interpretation of social work activities. Yet such a strategy renders the exam vulnerable to the criticism that the questions are subject to diverse interpretation. The goal of broadening the scope of the exam and at the same time avoiding all ambiguities continues to elude us. We do take comfort, however, in the fact that no situation has arisen in which the exam was clearly inapplicable to a student's practicum setting, and at the same time reliability data indicate that the present items do yield adequate consistency in assessors' judgments.

There are other shortcomings that are less a result of focus of the exam than of its format. Our reliance upon students' retrospective descriptions of practice activities leaves us with a feeling of uneasiness. We realize that, while we seek to assess the demonstrated practice skills of our students, what we in fact evaluate is the students' reports about what they did and why they did it. Kadushin, in discussing his procedure of soliciting introspective analyses of interview tapes, succinctly identified the dangers and also the mitigating features of relying on student self-report:

It is recognized that the retrospective introspection is open to all sorts of hazards of rationalization, defensiveness, distortion, and deliberate fabrication. Simulated recall may not result in making available what actually went on in the heart and mind of the student as he conducted the interview. However, even if the student is attempting to defensively rationalize the reasons for his interventions on an ad hoc basis, the autocritical comments require an awareness of what needs explanation and a knowledge of the theory which might make the interventions acceptable and explicable. Such comments, even when not faithful to the actuality of the events as they transpired, are a tribute to the sensitivity, diagnostic acuity and theoretical acumen of the student.¹

One method of rectifying this situation would be to require video or audio transcriptions of worker-client encounters as part of

the exam. Yet even this simple remedy would be beset by problems concerning the representativeness of the samples submitted. Who is to choose, and how is the selection to be made? We have been unable to find a practical solution to the problem within the context of our assessment panel format. We are concerned that the inclusion of interaction protocols will tend to make a procedure that is already expensive and time-consuming, even more so. For now our only protection against misrepresentation is the requirement that the field supervisor review the student's written materials for veracity.

The timing of the exam remains its most serious drawback. Coming as it does at the end of the students' undergraduate career, it serves only to evaluate and not to remediate. And the repercussions of informing students at the eleventh hour that they will not receive a degree only serve to weaken the achievement of quality control, the exam's *raison d'être*. Faculty examiners are well aware of the consequences of a failing evaluation, and a few of them candidly have admitted that occasionally they have conjured up a passing evaluation when in fact they felt otherwise. Although a student who fails the exam is allowed to undertake a new practicum assignment and submit a new exam at the end of that experience, there is a universal feeling on the part of the faculty that a less traumatic form of recycling is warranted.

The sink-or-swim character of our current assessment procedure is unavoidable given the present tie between the exam and the practicum experience that comes at the end of the student's undergraduate career. If we are to make any changes in the timing of the exam, it appears that we must divorce at least some of our assessment efforts from the practicum. We then could restructure the assessment procedure into modules that could be linked to appropriate parts of the curriculum and distributed throughout the student's undergraduate program.

Such a shift in strategy would, of course, require that we depart from our exclusive reliance upon work sample methodology. The most promising alternative appears to be the use of simulations, an alternative that we intend to explore in earnest. Yet as noted in Chapter 3, the use of simulations in assessment brings with it a whole new set of problems to be solved.

We hope that these problems can be overcome, and that we can implement an assessment program that provides both quality control and a mechanism for the identification of skill deficiencies in time for those deficiencies to be remediated. As mentioned previously, the mere existence of our present assessment program allows us time to explore other approaches carefully.

Since we will continue to use the MSWCS, we intend to improve it in any way that we can. We expect to modify the wording of the

test items to increase clarity and conciseness. We hope to devise a practical way to include transcriptions of worker-client encounters within the assessment procedure. We are now developing a more extensive and systematic program for training faculty examiners, in the hope that reliability can be enhanced. Lastly, we will attempt to establish some estimate of the predictive validity of the MSWCS evaluations.

One final comment is in order as we conclude this review of our assessment efforts. We feel that we have made some progress in discovering a viable method for assessing social work practice skills, yet in doing so we have achieved no methodological breakthroughs. On the contrary, although we talk about work sample methodology, in fact we have chosen to rely on an augmented version of a very old device — the clinical case presentation.

In a very real sense, the comment "so what's new" is entirely appropriate. Case presentations have been around for a long time, and many agencies use them as a matter of course. What we have done is to employ this time-worn vehicle in a systematic way to attempt to ensure minimal levels of practice competence. We have found that evaluative judgments of ability based upon such practice specimens can be made with reasonable consistency, and that these judgments tend to be more stringent than field supervisor evaluations. Additionally, we found that the entire procedure provides valuable information about what we are and are not getting across to our students.

The investment we have made, and continue to make, in terms of time and effort is substantial, and as Brennen points out in Chapter 8, may be more than many programs can afford. Yet clearly some method of quality control is imperative within the field of social work, and the alternative of doing nothing is likely to prove to be the most expensive of all.

NOTE

1. Alfred Kadushin, "Final Report: An Innovative Program in Social Work Education, the 3-2 Program," mimeographed (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin School of Social Work, 1973), p. 59.

Chapter 7

Toward a Competency-Based Baccalaureate Social Work Curriculum

by JOHN C. SPORES & MARY CUMMINGS

Late 1974 marked the beginning of a period of particularly intensive curriculum development and change in the baccalaureate social work program at the University of Montana. While several significant developments predated this period and will be reported, at this writing the bulk of the effort to develop a professional competency-based curriculum occurred during the twelve months preceding August 1975.

Three sources, two internal and the other external, provided the impetus for the heightened level of activity. First, the development of a competency-based program of baccalaureate-level social work

education was an objective of long-standing interest to several program faculty members. The fall of 1974 marked the juncture when this interest resulted in efforts to reconceptualize and reorganize classroom curriculum and to develop further the field component with the competency-based program objective. Second, general university procedures and requirements were an important determinant of action in that it was necessary to move on curriculum revisions during the 1974-75 year in order to meet deadlines for the 1976-78 University of Montana Catalog. Students are legally accountable only for requirements specified by the catalog effective at the time of admission to the university. Curriculum and requirement revisions had to be ready for action by university committees in the spring of 1975. Third, the critical observations of the Council on Social Work Education Accreditation Site Visit Team in May 1974 and the subsequent findings of the CSWE Commission on Accreditation were influential in generating and guiding curriculum development efforts.

The largely descriptive report that follows is of a curriculum development effort in process, in a state of flux. A framework has been developed for a revamped curriculum that will be implemented fully in September 1976. But this chapter describes our curricular framework through the 1974-75 academic year and discusses a number of factors influencing and conditioning its development.

SERVICE AREA AND PROGRAM CHARACTERISTICS

Both the setting and the primary service area of the social work program at the University of Montana are decidedly rural. The 1970 population of Montana was 694,409, with no city over 100,000.¹ Missoula, the location of the university, has a population of about 50,000 including the surrounding area, and the population within a 50-mile radius is no more than 75,000. The social service network in the state is characterized by agencies of limited staff size that attempt to provide service to an extensive geographic area. Agencies located in relatively remote areas and operated by a single staff person are common. In the five urban areas of the state with more than 30,000 population, larger, more complex social service agencies exist, although few approach the size and scale of agencies in heavily urbanized areas of the United States.

Department of Social Work data on social work personnel utilization in Montana reveal that in excess of 95 percent of direct social work services are provided by baccalaureate-level personnel. The American Indian population of the state is 27,130 (about 4 percent) with over 75 percent of them residing in rural locales, most with less than 1,000 population. Seven reservations are located in the state.

The total nonwhite population is only 31,366.

There are no graduate programs of social work education in Montana. The two nearest CSWE-accredited graduate schools (at the University of Utah and the University of Washington) are both about 500 miles away. The new graduate school being developed at Eastern Washington State College is closer geographically and is likely to include Montana in its service area. Besides the program at the University of Montana, two other CSWE-accredited baccalaureate programs exist in the state and focus on Montana as their chief service area.

The social work program at the University of Montana has departmental status within the College of Arts and Sciences. The Department of Social Work was created in 1971; for roughly 35 years there had existed a social work presence within the Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Social Welfare. In large part, the program's experience as one of several professional programs within the College of Arts and Sciences has been good, with liberal arts faculty and administration, and university administrative officials helping to further the objectives of the program.

Overall enrollment at the university hovers near 9,000. At the end of 1974-75, there were 138 formally declared majors enrolled in the social work program. This number represents a 10 to 20 percent undercount due to time-lag factors in university procedures for reporting declaration of major. During the course of the year, 642 non-social work majors enrolled in social work courses, the majority of these in introductory courses in social welfare and in social work practice. Additionally, the program provides a relatively wide range of continuing education course offerings and workshops throughout the state, with over 700 individuals participating during 1974-75. The program is staffed by 11 full-time and 5 part-time faculty members, the full time equivalency amounting to 14.² The ratio of faculty to social work majors is approximately one to 10. All except 2 faculty members hold MSW degrees, while 4 possess doctoral degrees. There are 2 full professors, 4 associate professors, 9 assistant professors, and one instructor. For a majority of the faculty, this represents their initial experience as campus-based social work educators. One additional important fact is that follow-up data on program graduates has indicated that a majority remain in Montana after graduation.

SPECIFICATION OF PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

As stated in earlier chapters, the approach taken in attempting to develop a competency-based program has been first to specify overall program objectives; second, to specify those competencies viewed as desirable for a beginning-level practitioner in the primary

geographic service area of the program; then to construct an instrument that will test the extent to which students have acquired the desired competencies; and finally to design and implement a curriculum that enables competency-building. The four tasks have been addressed more simultaneously than successively, although to some extent the emphasis on competency specification and testing instrumentation was greater proportionately in 1973-74, while the emphasis on curriculum development increased in 1974-75.

In order of importance, overall program objectives in 1973-74 were stated broadly as: (1) preparation for social work practice, (2) preparation for admission to graduate study in social work, and (3) preparation for informed citizen participation in the solution of social problems. Faculty discussion at the beginning of 1974-75 generated further specificity with respect to the first objective. The primary objective was viewed as the development of generalist practitioners who possess competencies fostering effective intervention in a variety of problem situations. That is, social workers whose orientation is problem- rather than method-oriented and whose selection of intervention strategies and tasks is determined by an analysis of the problem to be solved. Generalist practitioners constantly maintain a problem-solving focus for actual problem solution and enlist from their knowledge base and skill repertoire appropriate knowledge and skills, rather than being forced continually to rely on a specific technique or method.

Similar to other professional helping persons, baccalaureate practitioners do not possess the knowledge and competency or command the resources necessary for solving many of the problem situations they confront. Thus the enlistment of appropriate helping services other than those they or the agency are able to provide is a decidedly important skill area. However, in the heavily rural setting that characterizes much of Montana, referral possibilities are often severely limited. The worker may be the only available trained helping person, and effective practice demands a high degree of self-sufficiency, flexibility, and creativity.

For the majority of practitioners in Montana, the generalist problem-solving orientation is appropriate and desirable. It is an orientation through which practitioners possess a mind set, knowledge base, and skill repertoire affording them familiarity with and beginning ability to analyze and address the widest possible range of problematic situations, whether at the individual, group, organizational, community, or broader social policy level. The primary objective of the program is the development of such practitioners.

In discussing program objectives, mention should be made of two additional program facets. First, while the largest minority group

in Montana, American Indians, constitutes only 4 percent of the population, the social problems confronting them are vast. The practitioner can expect a degree of involvement with them far exceeding that ordinarily expected on the basis of population numbers alone. There is a dramatic need for awareness of and sensitivity to American Indian history, culture, social structure, and process. The program attempts to address this need both through recruitment of American Indian students and faculty and through providing appropriate curricular content.

Finally, the relatively extensive continuing education commitment of the program is atypical of social work programs at the baccalaureate level. In the initial stages of the program's development (1968-70), a paucity of continuing education resources for social service personnel was acknowledged. This led to designating the provision of continuing education services for these individuals as a central program function. Presently, no effort has been made to introduce competency-based criteria to the continuing education component of the program. As such, this program is not particularly relevant to the present discussion, except that the reader should be aware that substantial program resources and faculty effort are devoted to other than the campus-based program discussed in this chapter.

SPECIFICATION OF COMPETENCY EXPECTATIONS

The effort to specify the competency expectations for beginning practice in the service area of the program has been nearly continuous since 1971-72. In that year, field instruction assessment instruments were collected from a number of social work programs. A review of these revealed a high percentage of agreement regarding areas of competence and performance to be evaluated. With these documents as well as input from individual faculty members, a new field assessment instrument was developed for the Montana program.

This document provided the basic framework within which efforts were initiated in 1973-74 to specify further social work knowledge and skill areas in which students were expected to demonstrate competence. An initial listing was developed with recognition that it was not comprehensive or representative of all practice. Since that time at least three revisions have occurred, each one a further elaboration of earlier versions. A revised and relatively detailed listing of competency expectations was developed in February 1975, and it is this explication that was most instrumental in the development of the curriculum framework described below. Since February a further revision has occurred; this is the version reproduced in Chapter 4. However, it included no major substantive changes and the basic

structure of the projected curriculum remained intact.

The revamped curriculum structure attempts to provide for addressing all competency expectations. The current competency testing instrument is not similarly exhaustive, but rather it samples from the full range of knowledge and skill expectations. Should competency expectations change in the future, corresponding curricular adjustments necessarily will ensue. However, it is apparent that the faculty has begun to achieve a degree of closure on the issue of appropriate competency expectations and for the time being, major changes in this area do not seem likely. Design and implementation of a curriculum that addresses itself to the full range of competency expectations has assumed a position of central importance.

During 1973-74 and 1974-75 there were a number of occurrences and processes of importance for the development of the revised curriculum. The discussion will now shift to a description of some of the more significant of these.

THE COMPETENCY EXAMINATION

In the fall of 1973 six students took the newly developed seven-item summative competency examination described in Chapter 4. One student failed and by the end of the school year, a second student also failed. Successful completion of the exam was required in order to receive a passing grade in the practicum, and successful completion of the practicum was required in order to obtain a BSW. Failure on the exam had significant implications for the students involved. It delayed graduation for one while he was "recycled" through a different field placement and retested. He passed the second time. The second student elected to drop the social work major rather than recycle through a different placement.

The impact of these "failure" experiences on the other students was dramatic. In the past, failure of the practicum had been almost nonexistent. Once a student had entered the practicum, completion of the major was virtually assured. The practicum was a place to receive experience and training, and active participation was sufficient to ensure a passing grade. The initiation of the competency examination and the subsequent failure of students radically changed this perspective.

Students immediately began to express concern about their educational experiences. Questions were raised about the adequacy of the practicum program and classroom instruction. Anxiety levels spiraled. Groups of students formed and sought mutual support, reassurance, and clarification of the expectations of the competency examination. Many objected to the exam, stating that the present cur-

riculum had not prepared them for it and that they were being used as "guinea pigs" for an experiment in social work education. Meetings with faculty were called to explain the exam further. Special instruction sheets were developed and distributed to faculty and students in order to clarify procedures and to answer questions about exam rationale and need. For students, the learning of specific information and skills assumed an unprecedented salience. More active involvement in the educational process came in the form of demands that faculty assume responsibility for providing the kind of knowledge, skills, and experiences that would prepare students to complete the exam satisfactorily.

COMPETENCY EXAMINATION IMPACT ON THE PRACTICUM PROGRAM

The component of the curriculum most dramatically affected by the initiation of the competency examination in 1973-74 was the practicum program. There were a number of reasons for this. A particularly important and somewhat idiosyncratic one was the structural tie of the exam to the practicum. This tie was originally necessitated because a binding university catalog requirement for the exam could not be instituted until issuance of a new catalog in 1976. The only way to require the exam was to make it part of a mandatory course. Another reason sprang from the fact that documentation for the exam came from the practicum experience. Students were required to provide examples from their practice experience to demonstrate competence in specific areas. If the practicum experience did not provide appropriate experiences, the student was at an obvious disadvantage.

Supervisors of students involved in preparing for the exam were directly affected since they had been assigned responsibility for assisting students in the preparation of materials. Not only was the student evaluated through the exam, but the practicum placement and the supervisor were implicitly evaluated also. The student's failure to perform well on the exam was frequently attributed to the inadequacy of the placement and/or the supervision. Under this pressure, changes began to appear in the practicum program. Supervisors began to gear the students' experience toward completion of the exam. Simulated written competency examinations and mock orals appeared. It was assumed that by practicing the expected behaviors and receiving immediate feedback from the supervisor, the student's learning would be geared more specifically to successful completion of the exam.

The process of preparing simulated written exams and mock orals provided a basis for supervisors to evaluate the original exam, and it soon became apparent that several items were ambiguous, rep-

etitious, or not demonstrable from the practicum experience. In essence, the exam became a teaching tool to instruct the student. Its limitations were identified and revisions recommended.

Problems of teaching for the test also began to surface. Interpretation of test items varied from one supervisor to the next. Similarly, there were troubling differences in the evaluation of responses to these items. There appeared to be little consistency in the way particular items were interpreted and evaluated. In addition, it was anticipated that the exam would be modified the following year, creating further uncertainty and confusion for supervisors. Finally, it was apparent to some that supervisors' assistance in preparing for the exam was introducing an element of artificiality into the evaluation process and, hence, reducing the exam's validity. There were instances when some supervisors became overzealous in their efforts to help students.

DEVELOPMENT OF ADDITIONAL RATING INSTRUMENT

The students' level of performance on the competency examination was converted to a letter grade and this was entered as the grade *for the practicum experience*. It appeared that successful performance on the exam was heavily dependent on the students' ability to write, and in some cases this did not represent a satisfactory evaluation of their daily performance in the practicum. Several supervisors felt that these day-to-day experiences were of equal importance in determining the students' overall competency. In response to this concern, a committee of practicum supervisors developed a rating instrument to evaluate the students' practicum experience primarily in those areas they viewed as *not* being tapped by the exam.

It was intended that the work experience rating instrument complement the exam and enable a more comprehensive and accurate assessment of the practicum performance *per se*. The work experience rating instrument included the following categories: meets work expectations, use of supervision, relationship with agency staff and other students, relationship with clients, and use of self. Four to eight derivative items to be evaluated were developed for each category. Only in the category "relationship with clients" was there perceived to be direct overlap with the exam; the supervisors viewed the exam as an adequate indicator of overall actual performance in this area of central importance.

The final grade for the students' practicum experience was based on a combination of the exam score and the supervisor's assessment on the work experience rating instrument. The one exception was that a failing performance on the exam automatically meant failure

of the practicum and, therefore, failure to attain the credits necessary to graduate from the program. The development and utilization of the work experience rating instrument served to allay some of the concern expressed by practicum supervisors, and thus efforts to build a competency-based program could proceed.

STRONG EMPHASIS ON PRACTICUM SUPERVISOR ACCOUNTABILITY

The emergence of simulation exercises for both the written and oral exam components and the development of the work experience rating instrument represent two concrete examples of the impact on the field practicum generated by introduction of the competency examination. In general, the exam served to promote greater standardization in the field practicum experience. Specific areas of learning were identified more explicitly than before, and practicum experiences began to be revised in ways that fostered acquisition of identified competency skills. As a result, an increasing level of practicum supervisor accountability was introduced. Although the objectives of the practicum were identified in the fieldwork manual, there existed no systematic means of assuring that each field placement complied with them. In fact, each placement was basically an autonomous unit structured according to available resources, providing experiences dictated by the supervisor's interests and expertise. This was particularly true when supervisors were not members of the faculty. The exam required supervisors to reevaluate practicum learning experiences, making certain these were geared toward stated practicum objectives and competency expectations.

Because it was initiated prior to the development of a corresponding competency-based classroom curriculum, the exam placed an inordinate degree of responsibility and pressure on the practicum supervisor. What students had not learned through classroom instruction or acquired through other experience that would prepare them for the exam now became the responsibility of the practicum program. Not surprisingly, it was soon discovered that past classroom instruction and learning was severely limited in developing the competencies students were expected to demonstrate on the exam and the supervisor was faced with an enormous task.

Considerable time, which normally would have been spent in other learning activities, was devoted to assisting students with preparation of written exam material. Complaints were heard frequently that the ongoing work experiences in the practicum were being short-changed and clients neglected while students prepared for the exam. Supervisors expressed concern and sometimes anger about being bur-

dened with what they perceived as the entire responsibility of preparing increasingly anxious students for the exam. Revision of the exam the following year and limiting supervisory assistance in preparation of the written material alleviated these problems to some extent.

But more work is needed to ensure that preparation for the exam does not interfere or limit the learning experience provided in the practicum. Eventual implementation of the revised classroom curriculum should ease problems engendered by the initial heavy responsibility thrust on the practicum for development of competencies enabling a passing performance on the exam.

IMPACT ON CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION

Introduction of the exam carried limited impact on classroom content and activities during 1973-74. In response to student concerns, a growing acceptance of the competency-based direction of the program, and initial identification of expected competencies, individual faculty members began to discuss the exam in their classes and to place greater emphasis on content bearing a direct relationship to competency expectations. Every faculty member was involved in evaluating student performance on the exam. The common experience of venturing into unfamiliar, vague, anxiety-producing territory had a dramatic effect on drawing the faculty together.

Minor course revisions were introduced by individual faculty, but in order to allow necessary time and resources for the priority areas of further identifying and specifying competency expectations and further developing assessment procedures, a concentrated effort at major curriculum reorganization was not initiated until the following year. However, one course, Introduction to Social Work Practice, usually the second course chronologically in the curriculum, was revised significantly. With an enrollment of mostly sophomores, this was the first course in the curriculum that emphasized the social work profession and social work practice.

Since declaration of social work as a major generally follows enrollment in this course, it is deemed an appropriate point to introduce students to both the set of competencies required for successful exit from the program and the competency assessment procedures. Near the end of the course students take a simulated competency examination that includes those elements of the exam that students should begin to address at this stage. A problem situation is presented, and students are asked to provide a working definition of practice. They are expected to conduct a problem assessment of the case and identify how several models of intervention might be employed. At present, students are limited to a written presentation. In the future, for

students intending to major in social work but encountering difficulty with the exam, special assistance will be provided along with advice regarding remedial measures or if necessary, under faculty guidance, recycling through course content that addresses those areas in which the student is deficient.

CSWE ACCREDITATION SITE VISIT

In May 1974, a CSWE Accreditation Site Visit Team reviewed the social work program relative to its compliance with the 1974 *Standards for the Accreditation of Baccalaureate Degree Programs in Social Work*. The site-visit team report, and the formal letter of notification that followed favorable action by CSWE's Commission on Accreditation on our program's application for accreditation, cited a number of areas which could be improved and brought into stronger compliance with standards. Both acknowledged the transitional nature of the program while pointing out concerns about its totality relative to expected educational outcomes, program coherence, and integration. A lack of fit was noted between educational objectives and curriculum organization and content. Additionally, a need was indicated for improved coverage in several required content areas and for the development of a strengthened advising system. Finally, concern was expressed over the temporal adequacy of several of the program's one-quarter block practicum placements. Program faculty were encouraged to continue their program reconceptualization and curriculum reorganization with the objective of achieving a more fully integrated program.

The observations of the site-visit team and the Commission on Accreditation reflected the midstream situation in which the program found itself at the end of the 1973-74 academic year in its effort to develop a competency-based program. While program faculty were aware that major curriculum revision was warranted, having "outsiders" emphasize this need helped significantly to generate and sustain the level of faculty interest and concern necessary for curriculum reorganization — a reorganization that would be consistent with the development of an innovative program in full compliance with CSWE standards.

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT: PROCESS AND ISSUES DURING 1974-75

In the fall of 1974, the social work faculty embarked on a major curriculum reorganization directed toward the development of a

competency-based program. A committee of three faculty members was formed; one was given release time from regular responsibilities and assigned the task of developing a working draft for curriculum revision. The other members were to provide input for the development of the draft and to receive, evaluate, and incorporate recommendations for change.

In preparation for this task, two courses of action were taken immediately. The first was a general review of social work programs involved in curriculum revision. It was hoped that examples of how others had approached curriculum reorganization might provide a framework around which the task could begin. Although the review provided some useful ideas, it was not particularly fruitful. While there were numerous accounts available describing appropriate content for inclusion in a social work curriculum and suggestions and guidelines for its sequencing, very little had been presented in the way of a blueprint for actual curriculum construction and implementation, most especially for an output-oriented competency-based program of social work education.

The second course of action was to secure the assistance of a social work educator with substantial experience in curriculum development. Two days were set aside at the beginning of the fall quarter for off-campus meetings with the entire faculty and the consultant. A number of models for curriculum development were presented and discussed.

Although no specific decisions were made at this two-day meeting, the discussion generated specification of a number of basic assumptions that served to provide direction for curriculum development. With the advantage of hindsight and the experience of nearly one year, some of these initial assumptions have been deleted or altered and others added. Programmatic extensions of some assumptions are explicit in the revised curriculum, others are not. Some will become manifest at a later phase of development. Twenty basic assumptions were noted.

1. The following principles should be utilized in developing the curriculum:
 - a. parsimony — avoid trying to do too much.
 - b. inclusiveness — insure that basic material is fully covered and well-integrated.
 - c. progression — course material should build upon previously presented material, from basic to more sophisticated analysis.
 - d. accountability at all levels.
2. The curriculum must be compatible with and exemplary of the primary objective of the Department of Social Work —

- preparation of a beginning-level generalist social work practitioner.
3. To graduate from the program, students must demonstrate that they are competent to enter social work practice as beginning-level generalist practitioners.
 4. Competence will be determined by the successful completion of course offerings and the achievement of a passing score on a competency examination to be administered when the student has completed all required courses.
 5. The curriculum will be structured to insure a logical and consistent development of competencies culminating in successful completion of the competency examination.
 6. Competency expectations will determine course content.
 7. The goals of each core class must be consistent with competency expectations. They must be clearly delineated, testable, and allow for change. When each course is fully developed, a means of evaluation based on behavioral expectations must be developed to assess if the course provides the learning it purports to provide.
 8. Professional social work practice entails three major components:
 - a. conceptual skills.
 - b. professional judgment.
 - c. technical skills.
 9. The conceptual aspect of professional competency, as evidenced in part by the practitioner's ability to articulate and assess a problem situation rationally, should be introduced early to provide opportunity to identify students with deficiencies in this area.
 10. The technical skill aspect of professional practice, reflected in part by the practitioner's ability to communicate effectively, should be introduced early to provide opportunity to identify students who are deficient in this area.
 11. Both the conceptual and technical aspects of professional practice should be introduced early in the curriculum to provide a base for later courses.
 12. The professional judgment component of the proposed curriculum cannot be "taught," as such, but rather its use must be demonstrated through decision making in specified case examples. It should be covered when there is a specific opportunity to illustrate its application in practice situations and after the student has acquired the basics in conceptual and technical skills. Three factors are to be considered in the development of the professional judgment component of social work practice.

- a. the immediate implications of selecting a particular course of action.
- b. the long-range implications.
- c. the basic principles can be articulated in selecting a particular course of action.
13. Practicum placements must be developed in such a way as to provide a broad scope of experiences complementing and consistent with the competency-based curriculum.
14. There must be a clear connection between the course offerings and practicum experiences.
15. The curriculum must build on a liberal arts base and include or make provision for CSWE-specified content (social work practice; social welfare policy and services; human behavior and the social environment; social research; 300 hours of field experience; and appropriate content relating to ethnic, racial, and cultural diversity).
16. A pretest or screening instrument will be introduced early in the program to determine the student's basic communication skills and value orientations.
17. The liberal arts base and basic content in the area of human behavior and social environment and in the area of ethnic, racial, and cultural diversity can be acquired systematically from extradepartmental sources, department offerings being primarily supplementary in these areas.
18. The curriculum will be structured to allow for "recycling" of students who have been unable to complete successfully a particular level or phase of the program (at first, primarily the failure to obtain a satisfactory grade in a particular course).
19. The style and focus of teaching must be compatible with a competency-based program.
20. The curriculum must allow for change and accountability. Teaching competency must be tested as well as student competency.

SUBSEQUENT CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

With basic assumptions identified and serving as guides, the three-member committee began work on translating assumptions into a proposal for curriculum revision. A working draft was prepared and near the end of the fall quarter it was circulated for review by faculty, several social work educators at other universities, and a number of practitioners. The draft included course descriptions, a rationale for each course, the relationship of individual courses to others, the rela-

tionship of each course to competency expectations as embodied in the competency examination, and the relationship of each course to CSWE accreditation standards. Suggestions and recommendations resulted in draft revisions; by the end of the quarter faculty were able to agree upon an outline of courses to be included in a revised curriculum.

The following quarter was devoted to an explication of projected courses, attempting to determine appropriate content and organization as well as general feasibility. Maximum faculty involvement was sought with four-member committees being assigned to each course and asked to develop a more comprehensive course description and outline. Each faculty member served on two committees, which encouraged crosscommittee communication and overall continuity. Care was taken to include on each committee the individual or individuals likely to bear final implementation and teaching responsibility. In addressing their tasks, the various committees relied on the expertise of individual faculty members, literature reviews, and review of course syllabi utilized in other social work programs. Each committee worked toward producing a suitable course description and outline.

The extent of faculty time and effort invested in this process cannot be overemphasized. The heavy flow of memoranda and the general intensity of other forms of communication were unprecedented. Faculty became increasingly aware of the vast set of programmatic implications involved in the development of a competency-based program. There emerged an unsettling realization that not only was the full explication and implementation of such a program probably impossible within the context existing at Montana but that even partial development would require years of sustained effort.

The crucial factor in maintaining collective faculty effort was the fact that if major curricular change was to be implemented before 1978, a fully developed curriculum proposal had to be submitted no later than May 1, 1975, to enable action by the college-wide curriculum review committee. The unpleasant prospect of being saddled for an additional two or three years with a curriculum structure with which there was substantial faculty dissatisfaction and which would jeopardize continued program accreditation was a motivating force sufficient to maintain the initiative, effort, and spirit of constructive compromise required to finalize a revised curriculum structure proposal.

The revision neared final form in the early weeks of the spring quarter. It was a substantially modified and elaborated document compared to the working draft available at the end of the fall quarter. While it is likely that no faculty member expressed total satisfaction

with the revised structure, it appeared to provide the necessary framework to permit the implementation of competency-based objectives and develop fuller compliance with accreditation standards. The heavy investment and involvement of all faculty members in its development facilitated a sharp awareness of the new curriculum structure, its short- and long-range programmatic implications, and increased the probability of its efficient and successful implementation.

AN OUTLINE OF CURRICULUM STRUCTURE

The general outline of the revised curriculum is presented below with references made to linkages with general competency areas and accreditation standards. In bold outline, it does not differ sharply from the array of courses available in a number of baccalaureate programs. What is novel is the explicit tie between the courses and a set of competency expectations for which the student is directly accountable in the form of a summative exam requiring satisfactory completion if degree requirements are to be met, and the fact that curriculum content in an organized and planful manner flows from competency expectations.

With the new curriculum not scheduled for introduction until September 1976, the 1975-76 academic year constituted a period during which the faculty engaged in intensive efforts to build into the program the content and features necessary for implementing competency-based objectives. While extensive detail on program implementation is not yet available, a general description and discussion of some features of the new curriculum may be helpful and instructive.

LIBERAL ARTS, HUMAN BEHAVIOR AND THE SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT, AND ETHNIC, RACIAL, AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY

CSWE accreditation standards require that the baccalaureate social work program build upon a liberal arts base that includes knowledge in the humanities, and the social, behavioral, and biological sciences; that content be provided in human behavior and the social environment; and that there be an emphasis on diverse ethnic, racial, and cultural patterns throughout the curriculum. At the University of Montana, heavy reliance will be placed on extradepartmental sources to assure that students acquire appropriate knowledge in these areas.

CSWE content guidelines in the area of human behavior and the social environment were followed in specifying a certain number of

required credit hours in each of the following fields: anthropology, biology, economics, political science, psychology, and sociology. Syllabi for a broad range of extradepartmental course offerings were solicited and reviewed in relation to desirability for inclusion in a list of required courses. As a list of specific course requirements was being developed, we had to recognize that other departments would be making requests to drop certain courses, would be offering certain courses on an irregular or infrequent basis, or that major changes would be forthcoming in the content of a given course. Because the problems in attempting to adhere to a set of highly specified extradepartmental requirements would be continual, it was decided to set credit-hour rather than course requirements in the various departments. Reliance will be placed on a strengthened advising system to guide students into the most appropriate courses. Each year syllabi are to be collected for courses related to human behavior and the social environment content area. If a review indicates that changes in course recommendations are desirable, a centrally developed set of advising guidelines will be revised accordingly.

While admittedly somewhat cumbersome — particularly for recordkeeping — this system permits ready adaptability in the event of course changes and fluctuations in other departments and provides for the monitoring necessary to assure that students acquire human behavior and the social environment content in a planful, organized manner. While the 52 credit hours minimally necessary to meet the requirement for this content area may appear an undue imposition in a system requiring 195 credit hours for graduation, it should be recognized that many of the courses recommended by advisors are at introductory levels, and students are likely to enroll in them whether or not they are required.

Extradepartmental requirements in the area of ethnic, racial, and cultural diversity will include six credit hours (two courses) in Native American Studies and an additional three hours in one of several courses related to this general area of inquiry. Given the primary service area of the program, particular emphasis will be placed on including appropriate American Indian content. An American Indian faculty member will provide guidance for other faculty members. The program also will offer special courses or specialized content within courses on social work in the American Indian context.

Since no college-wide liberal arts requirements exist, in addition to the above the program will require nine credit hours in liberal arts, classics, English, history, philosophy, or religious studies. The total of extradepartmental requirements appears to offer some assurance that students will acquire liberal arts content adequate to form the base for their professional education.

At this time the competency examination does not address directly the question of the adequacy of student knowledge, skills, and attitudes relative to these three major educational content areas. While each area is tapped indirectly by the exam, it is recognized that competency expectations related directly to these broad content areas should be specified and the competency evaluation process elaborated to permit direct assessment. The issue has not been resolved and current plans are to rely on grades in the various courses as the index of adequacy of preparation. While testing in these areas might be desirable, program resource investment in the existing exam process is so extensive that serious questions would arise regarding the feasibility of any further testing.

GENERAL OUTLINE OF REVISED CURRICULUM

Presented below is a general outline of the revised curriculum presented in the spring of 1975.

Social Work 100: Introduction to Social Welfare
(3-5 credit hours, no prerequisite)

This is a university-wide service course. The historical development of social welfare measures and programs is traced and basic social welfare concepts and principles are introduced. The broad range of social problems is reviewed and an overview of current social welfare provisions and human services is presented. Special effort is made to engage students in beginning analysis of the full range of social factors that condition and shape social welfare policy and programs. A framework is presented for analysis and assessment of social problems. Special attention is directed toward the social problems and social welfare needs of American Indians and rural areas that constitute much of Montana.

A basic text is used across all sections while relatively extensive reading is assigned in popular works that relate to the course. Substantial use is made of films and outside speakers. A written paper is assigned wherein the student is required to analyze a social problem area, including an assessment of the adequacy of existing provisions for problem alleviation and a presentation of recommendations on how the problem might be addressed more effectively. If enrollment is for five hours of credit the student participates in a lab involving structured observational experiences in local human service or human processing organizations. A paper is required describing both the experience and the agency as an organization. Students indicating interest in majoring in social work are encouraged to enroll in the lab.

Competency expectations addressed are:

1. The organizational context of practice (lab students only).
2. The community context of practice.
3. Problem identification and assessment.

CSWE accreditation standards met are: (1) social welfare policies and services content (elementary), and (2) ethnic, racial, and cultural diversity content.

Social Work 200: Introduction to Social Work Practice
(4 credit hours, prerequisite: SW 100)

This is an introduction to the professional practice of social work, including an examination of the goals, guiding philosophy, and basic assumptions of the profession. Emphasis is placed on introducing a generalist problem-solving practice framework that is applicable across a wide range of social work settings and problem situations. The appropriateness of the framework for the rural-based practitioner is emphasized. Attention is given to surveying practice settings and to the development of beginning practice-focused analytical skills.

Following extensive discussion, the faculty adopted *Social Work Practice: Model and Method*, by Allen Pincus and Anne Minahan as a text for this course. The problem-solving framework explicated in this work, with its emphasis on practice as a goal-oriented, planned change process, serves as the dominant organizing referent in implementing the program objective of educating and training competent generalist practitioners. All practice courses are developed with explicit reference to this framework.

Simulation exercises, videotape, audiotape, and film, among other teaching and learning tools, are employed in this course. Students are introduced to the program's competency expectations and assessment procedures and, as a final exercise, must complete a condensed version of the written component of the competency examination.

Competency expectations addressed are:

1. Problem identification and assessment.
2. Selection of an intervention plan (elementary level).
3. Implementation of the intervention plan (elementary level).
4. The professional context of practice.

CSWE accreditation standards met are:

1. Social work practice content.
2. Knowledge of the profession.
3. Organizing framework fosters integrated, coherent program.

Social Work 210: Basic Helping Skills in Social Work Practice
(4 credit hours, prerequisite: SW 200)

Topics covered in this course include: (1) interviewing techniques, (2) writing skills (letters, social histories, reports), (3) verbal skills (professionally related oral presentations, conducting and participating in meetings), and (4) utilizing communication equipment (movie projectors, videotape and audiotape recording equipment, and dictaphone). To address existing problems of utilizing inordinate amounts of time in upper-division courses in remedial activity, the course is designed to provide early training in basic social work helping skills and techniques. The course also serves identified needs by offering students additional early career testing opportunities and provides faculty the additional opportunity for early assessment of the student's capacity for learning and applying skills required in practice. The emphasis on developing writing skills occurs because of serious deficiencies in this area for many students.

Competency expectations addressed are: (1) problem identification and assessment, and (2) the professional context of practice.

The CSWE accreditation standard met is: "social work practice content."

Social Work 220: Community Volunteer Service
(2-4 credit hours, prerequisite: SW 100)

This course provides career-testing opportunities for undergraduates through a structured volunteer experience in a human service organization or in a group project addressing a community need. While it would be desirable at this point for all social work majors to gain elementary experience in the provision of services, the scarcity of such opportunities in the local area makes this an objective unfeasible for some students. For the latter, the emphasis must be on observation and elementary organizational analysis. All students analyze their organization or group project in terms of the analytical variables: goals, technology, structure, and environment. Weekly meetings are held in which discussion of experiences and observations occurs. Credit hours are determined by the number of hours weekly the student chooses to be involved in these activities. Due to the limited available opportunities, this course is not required of social work majors — the only course in this outline, outside of special topic courses and seminars, that is not required.

Competency expectations addressed are:

1. The organizational context of practice.
2. The community context of practice.

3. Problem identification and assessment.
4. Selection of an intervention plan (elementary level — usually group project students only).
5. Implementation of the intervention plan (elementary level — usually group project students only).
6. The professional context of service (for students assuming service provision roles in social service agencies).

The CSWE accreditation standard met is a desirable step preparatory to formal field instruction.

Social Work 300: Introduction to Research Methods in Social Work (3 credit hours, prerequisite: SW 200)

This course: (1) introduces strategies and methods employed in research related to social work and social welfare; (2) provides an overview of the function of descriptive and inferential statistics; (3) includes examination and review of representative studies; (4) relates and discusses the linkage of empiricism to the assessment of one's own practice performance and to the assessment of program effectiveness; (5) introduces techniques for data collection before, during, and following intervention efforts; (6) introduces techniques of data analysis; and (7) reviews studies in clinical judgment.

Accreditation standards, as well as the program, require that students sufficiently understand applied social research methodology to be knowledgeable consumers of research findings relevant to practice. A theme running throughout the program is the continual need to identify socially problematic situations, then to assess accurately the nature and extent of such situations, and finally to assess empirically the efficacy of corrective efforts by practitioners and programs. The emphasis on social program effectiveness evaluation and on accountability in general is particularly strong in today's society, and practitioners must be prepared to conduct and participate knowledgeably in analyses of their practice efforts as well as of the social programs in which they participate. Courses available elsewhere in the university did not appear to permit the social work major to acquire knowledge and skills in these several areas in a way conducive to economy of time and effort. Content on social program effectiveness evaluation was notably lacking. Thus it was viewed as necessary to develop content in this area and to forego reliance on extracurricular requirements.

Competency expectations addressed are: (1) problem identification and assessment, and (2) evaluation and feedback.

The CSWE accreditation standard met is "social work research content."

Social Work 310: Human Service Organizations
(3 credit hours, prerequisite: SW 200)

While this course is not a standard component in baccalaureate-level social work curricula, faculty identified a need for competency in organizational analysis going beyond superficial levels. Given the rural service area of the program, graduates sometimes quickly assume positions of administering a small social service organization or become involved in designing an organization to address community needs. The course thus provides for: (1) an introduction to organizational theory and its varieties; (2) a conceptual framework to be utilized in analyzing organizations; (3) skill development enabling utilization of this framework in the analysis of human service organizations; (4) study of the relationship of organizational structure to serving human needs and to the effectiveness with which such needs are met; and (5) an introduction to various techniques and approaches to purposeful organizational innovation and change.

Additionally, as a precursor to the community-level practice thrust of Social Work 360, a brief introduction to the community as a social system is included in this course. Concepts and processes include community structure, intergovernmental relationships, influence and decision making, competition and conflict, and development and change.

The primary rationale for this course is based on the fact that the vast majority of practice occurs within or originates from within human service organizations that condition and shape the services provided. Successful practice demands an understanding of the operation as well as the distinctive problems of human service organizations. The characteristics and operation of human service organizations and the set of exigencies they confront distinguish them from other types of organizations and make their detailed study a highly appropriate academic as well as practical enterprise. Successful application of any given social work interventive modality presupposes the existence of a series of organizational prerequisites. On occasion it is a human service organization itself that is the target for interventive efforts.

Successful intervention in the organizational arena requires understanding of organizational functioning, an ability to analyze organizations, and knowledge of interventive strategies appropriate to the organizational context. Finally, social workers, whether they are on their own or acting as consultants to a client group, are likely to be involved in the formation of new organizations to meet identified needs. Knowledge of organizational theory, functioning, and analysis should increase the likelihood of the success of organizational design

efforts.

Since most practice also occurs within the context of a community, it is important that students be introduced to social science content on community structure and processes. Two to three weeks are set aside for this introductory theoretical content. It is more economical for students to acquire the content in this manner than to be required to enroll in quarter-long courses elsewhere in the university.

Competency expectations addressed are:

1. The organizational context of practice.
2. The community context of practice.
3. Problem identification and assessment (secondary).
4. Selection of an intervention plan (secondary).
5. Implementation of the intervention plan (secondary).

The CSWE accreditation standard met is "social work practice content."

Social Work 344: Social Welfare Policy and Services
(3 credit hours, prerequisite: SW 200)

The focus of this course is on social welfare program planning and analysis, including review of selected policies on the national level. The primary objective is to develop beginning skills in the formulation and critical assessment of social policy, including agency policy. An additional objective is to acquaint students with strategies for improving agency service delivery systems. Toward these ends, content is provided fostering knowledge in the areas of: (1) the relationship of societal values and social problems to social welfare policies and services; (2) major policy considerations, such as who should benefit and under what conditions; (3) the universality of social stratification and the resulting *types* of welfare systems — social, fiscal, and occupational; (4) social service delivery system problems and possible solutions; (5) means for monitoring social programs and evaluating outcomes; and (6) selected racial and ethnic factors and their effect on program design and operation.

Competency expectations addressed are:

1. The organizational context of practice.
2. The community context of practice.
3. Problem identification and assessment.
4. Evaluation and feedback.

CSWE accreditation standards met are (1) social welfare policy and services content, and (2) ethnic, racial, and cultural diversity.

Social Work 350, 360, 450, and 460

These four courses constitute the social work practice content core of the curriculum. In 1975-76, considerable effort went into detailed development and explication of these courses. At this writing, only underlying logic and broad content outlines can be discussed. The four courses enable further development and integration of the conceptual, technical, and professional components as required by the generalist practitioner described earlier in the discussion of program objectives. The problem-solving framework explicated by Pincus and Minahan provides the integrating frame of reference for the practice core. Brief course descriptions are as follows.

SW 350: Social Work Practice I (4 credit hours, prerequisites: SW 210 and 300). This course consists of problem identification and assessment in generalist practice with individuals, groups, and families; and selection and utilization of appropriate interventive techniques and strategies at these levels with emphasis on evaluative analysis of intervention effectiveness.

SW 360: Social Work Practice II (4 credit hours, prerequisite: SW 350). This course consists of problem identification and assessment in generalist practice at the community level; emphasis on development of skills in social service planning, administration, and community development with particular attention to rural settings; and consideration of approaches to evaluative analysis of program effectiveness.

SW 450: Social Work Practice III (4 credit hours, prerequisite: SW 360). This course includes in-depth consideration of theoretical, conceptual, and practical elements in effective practice with different client populations; and advanced-level exploration of selected intervention models as employed in practice.

SW 460: Social Work Practice IV (4 credit hours, prerequisite: SW 450). This course includes integration within a generalist practice framework of the range of interventive techniques and strategies explored in earlier courses; and further development of practice skills through advanced-level analysis of selected cases, practice situation simulations, and other learning techniques.

Social Work Practice I and II must be taken prior to enrollment in the practicum. Social Work Practice III and IV are taken concurrently with the first and second quarters of what for most students will be a three-quarter concurrent practicum experience. Social Work Practice IV emphasizes heavily the Pincus-Minahan framework attempting, in conjunction with the field experience and the competency examination, to reinforce the generalist frame of reference and to foster a sense of integration for the individual student.

All competency expectation areas are addressed, especially:

1. Problem identification and assessment.
2. Selection of an intervention plan.
3. Implementation of the intervention plan.
4. Evaluation and feedback.

The CSWE accreditation standard met is "social work practice content."

Social Work 499: Fieldwork Practicum
(15 credit hours, prerequisite: SW 360)

As discussed earlier, with the attempt to implement competency-based program objectives, coordination of the practicum program proved difficult. Introduction of the revised curriculum serves to distribute more equitably the responsibility for assisting students in meeting competency expectations.

In the past the program offered a combination of two- and three-quarter concurrent and one-quarter block practicum placements. Based both on competency examination results and the observations of the accreditation site-visit team, the program faculty questioned the adequacy of the majority of the one-quarter block placements. Severe time shortage has been evident in most block placements, particularly when students opted to complete their practicum and the competency examination during the same quarter.

Consequently most future placements will be structured on a two- or three-quarter concurrent basis. Several desirable placements — particularly those on reservations — are located at considerable distances from the university; the block plan will be maintained but with strengthened coordination and liaison activity and for a two-quarter minimum time period. Students accepting such placements do so at a sacrifice since the 15-credit hour maximum for the practicum will continue to hold, and it is unlikely that other credit hours can be earned during this period. Additionally, the distances involved mean that these students probably will not be able to participate in the weekly professional seminar that accompanies the practicum for students enrolled on a concurrent basis. Such problems are characteristic of those encountered in attempting to structure and coordinate an educationally sound program of field instruction in the face of exigencies presented by a heavily rural geographic context.

Professional seminar sessions meet from two to three hours weekly, providing an arena for discussion of practicum-related matters and professional issues. Through discussion of experienced cases and practice situations, a central function of the sessions is to develop further student capacity in the professional judgment component of practice.

The set of competency expectations and the competency examination provide a framework with which the practicum experience of each student is structured. Since the content provided in completing the exam comes from this experience, it follows that if students are to graduate with a degree in social work, during the practicum they must demonstrate competency in beginning-level practice. Intensive liaison activity with nonfaculty practicum supervisors is crucial in ensuring that the program's competency-based objectives, expectations, and assessment procedures are understood and accepted. If students fail to demonstrate minimal competency during the practicum or do not perform satisfactorily on the competency examination, the matter is reviewed and a decision is made by the practicum committee (with faculty, student, and practitioner members) regarding reassignment to another placement. If specific deficiencies have been revealed, it is also possible for students to take advantage of remedial measures either prior to or in conjunction with practicum reassignment.

Obtaining accurate feedback from the practicum program directly, in conjunction with the indirect feedback acquired by means of the competency examination, probably represents the most important requirement in developing and implementing a competency-based program. To improve feedback quality, a policy of participation by all faculty in practicum supervision has been instituted. In addition to those whose primary assignment is to serve as practicum supervisors, all faculty members are assigned at least one student to supervise. While faculty resources are such that not everyone need be engaged in supervision, practicum supervisors expressed the belief that participation of all faculty would heighten awareness of the impact of competency expectations and the exam itself on the student's practicum experience. Hypothetically, this will lead to increased and more useful feedback for assessing competency-based implemental structures and processes. The program will test the universal supervisory responsibility procedure for a two-year period after which its utility and the desirability of continuance will be assessed.

All competency expectation areas are addressed in this course. CSWE accreditation standards met are:

1. Field experience requirement.
2. Ethnic, racial, and cultural diversity.
3. Explicated expected educational outcomes.

Special Topic Courses

In addition to the courses listed above, a range of elective special topic courses and seminars are provided. A variety of specialized fields of service and practice-related topics are addressed. American Indian-

related offerings are provided on at least a once-yearly basis. Social work practice with alcoholism and other addictions; social work with the developmentally disabled; social work in correctional settings, with marriage and family-related problems, and with human sexuality; social work in relation to problems of aging, use of behavior modification techniques in practice, sex-based influences on therapy; and planned social change are examples of other topics addressed in recent years. Such offerings are viewed as an important supplement to the basic curriculum.

NEED FOR STRENGTHENED ADVISING SYSTEM

Nearly all works on competency-based education emphasize the pivotal importance of the advising function. An intensive counseling-advising program for students is essential, the advising relationship ideally being one of individualized teaching and learning. The advisor must: (1) knowledgeably interpret and discuss personal learning and career objectives; (2) interpret for the student the underlying rationale and objectives of the competency-based program; (3) interpret all the requirements for graduation; and (4) be a learning facilitator, assessing needs of the individual student, making known alternatives available (or that need to be marshalled) for addressing these needs, and assisting the student in selecting a course of action appropriate to particular learning needs.

Beyond this, Jarrett stated that the advising relationship should include the opportunity for affective involvement between faculty member and student, the advisor becoming someone with whom the student can be close and establish identification — a person to be trusted.¹ In sum, the advisor is the only individual besides the student who works consistently with the totality of academic learning experiences, thus enabling the advisor to provide meaningful feedback on the student's effort to manage that totality.

In the social work program at the University of Montana, formal student advising has been viewed by faculty as an unpleasant secondary adjunct duty. Advising has been largely student-initiated and characterized by inconsistent, uneven coverage. Such a system is clearly inadequate for a program with competency-based objectives and so steps are being taken to develop a greatly strengthened system, with advising assuming primary functional importance. During 1975-76 a coordinator developed a detailed set of advising procedures and guidelines. While full specification must await further explication of the revised curriculum, several aspects of the system merit comment at this writing.

When students declare social work as a major, they will be as-

signed an advisor. Student preferences for specific advisors will be honored insofar as they do not generate highly inequitable workloads. A central record of advising assignments will be maintained with all faculty required to submit brief accounts of advising contacts with each advisee assigned to them. Past and present advising accounts will be reviewed periodically by the coordinator. If difficulties surface, the coordinator will assume responsibility for initiating corrective action.

In general, all students will be required to meet with their advisors at the beginning of the academic year. At this meeting the student and advisor will determine jointly the need for further formal advising sessions. If the student has a clearly established program of study for the year and no problems are anticipated, further advising contact will be at the option of student or advisor. For students experiencing difficulty or who wish a more intense advising relationship, more frequent formal contacts will occur. Many view a policy of frequent advising as wasteful, since it does not take into account differences among students in the need for direction and guidance. However, procedures must exist whereby either faculty or students may with ease initiate this type of advising relationship when circumstances dictate.

The coordinator, with faculty participation and assistance, will develop a set of advising guidelines aimed at implementing advising objectives. With the reliance of the program on extradepartmental sources for providing human behavior and social environment content and with the requirement of only a specific number of credit hours in various fields, guidelines will be of particular importance in this area. The extradepartmental course monitoring system mentioned earlier will aid in providing updated, accurate guidelines for course selection in meeting this requirement. The changed nature of the advising function in the program along with what are likely to become relatively complex guidelines and procedures, will combine to dictate the need for faculty training and discussion sessions centered on advising. This will be so particularly at the time the new advising system is initiated.

Finally, it should be noted that traditionally in academia the advising function has not been rewarded in a manner providing incentive for dedicated, effective performance. As a beginning toward providing such incentives, the advising coordination function will be assigned the equivalent of as many as two- or three-credit hours per quarter. At some time in the future it may be desirable (and possible) to allow individual faculty serving as advisors to be compensated similarly for the extensive, time-consuming responsibility necessarily involved in advising in the competency-based program.

CONCLUSION

1975-76 was a year of extensive faculty effort to explicate in detail the curriculum described in broad outline in this chapter and scheduled for implementation in September 1976. Part of this effort was intended to develop explicit linkages between each competency expectation and the curriculum, providing structurally for adequate curricular provision for each expectation. Further development of the practicum program, designing a new advising system, and more refinement of competency assessment procedures all represent crucial needs to be addressed. At the same time, there were continued efforts to foster a singleness of purpose among program faculty and personnel and to build understanding and support for the enterprise among students, university faculty, and administrators; social work and other human service practitioners; legislators; and individuals and groups representing the interests of actual or potential clients.

We realize that the projected structure diverges in many respects from desiderata specified in theoretical works on competency-based curricula. Perhaps the projected curriculum can be described best as representing "what is possible" in moving toward a competency-based program at this particular time and in the institutional context of the University of Montana. As has been noted elsewhere, a fully developed competency-based program requires major restructuring of institutional and program policies and activities such as admissions criteria, faculty roles, counseling and advising, graduation requirements, grading, transcript formats, faculty evaluation and reward structure, administrative relationships, and academic decision-making processes.⁴ Obviously this is no small task.

The faculty at the University of Montana are cognizant of being at an early stage in the developmental process of fully explicating and implementing a competency-based program. It is hoped that this statement of our efforts to develop a competency-based curriculum in baccalaureate social work education will be instructive to others interested in seeking improved educational and professional accountability. There is an increasingly substantial literature setting forth the theoretical parameters of competency-based education. The present chapter, as well as Chapters 4-6, represent an early report on an actual experience. Federico's comments here seem apt:

The exact problems will vary by school, and solutions will have to be worked out taking existing structures and potential alternatives into account. The important point is that adaptations are possible, and that competency-based education is not necessarily an all or nothing proposition.⁵

NOTES

1. All population figures are from the 1970 United States Population Census.
2. Additionally, five teaching assistants, past graduates of the program, are employed full time and assist faculty in classroom and other program-related activities.
3. Herbert Holt Jarrett, Jr., "Competency-Based Education in the Liberal Arts" (PhD diss., University of Georgia, 1974), p. 72.
4. William R. O'Connell, Jr., and W. Edmund Moomaw, eds., *A CBC Primer* (Atlanta, Ga. : Southern Regional Education Board, 1975), p. 3.
5. Ronald Federico, "Accreditation and Competence," in *The Use of Competency-Based Education in Social Work Education: A Task Force Report* (Atlanta: Southern Regional Education Board, 1974), p. 12.

PART III

*Critiques of
The Montana Experience*

Chapter 8

Is the Work Sample Approach Feasible?

by E. CLIFFORD BRENNEN

Demonstrations in the social realm work best when first tried. The initial zest, heavy commitment of resources, and idiosyncratic features found in the original enterprise are rarely matched by replications. And widespread adoption exerts a leavening effect. This factor alone would decree that the testing strategy yield to the constraints of exportability. "Can other programs readily adopt our instrument and procedures?" is the question we have asked ourselves at the University of Montana. We may have to temper our efforts to explore the limits of the possible and turn our attention to feasibility.

THE STATE OF UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION

No examination designed for use nationwide will succeed without taking into account the present state of undergraduate social work education. On the positive side there are students in abundance, and the programs having applied for accreditation are so numerous that the CSWE Commission on Accreditation has been able to reject about one-third of all applications in the interest of quality control, without endangering supply.¹ On the negative side, the growth of education for *professional practice* on the undergraduate level has not come without pain. Social work programs have had to establish their autonomy in a period of faculty retrenchment and "the budget crunch." In many instances, programs have had to wrestle with administrative indifference to the increased flow of students into the major (and away from other majors), absorbing the influx without a corresponding increase in faculty positions. The commitment of undergraduate faculty, particularly in the smaller programs, in the face of such odds is an unheralded event in the history of social work education.

The student-faculty ratio in undergraduate programs is typically 30-40 to one.² A modal-sized program then might consist of 3 or 4 faculty handling 120 majors and a substantial number of nonmajors in service courses. Released time for administrative tasks is minimal, and in general the department and college do not fully understand the implications of moving from a liberal arts sequence to preparation for immediate practice. In sum, undergraduate programs are understaffed and underfunded; consequently they would be hard put to incorporate any competency testing procedure that is time-consuming. The designers of an exportable examination, be they at the University of Montana or elsewhere, must keep before them the image of an overworked handful of faculty members who have no taste for adding to their burden.

Moreover, this state of affairs is not likely to change. Not only may demographic factors lead to declining enrollments as the baby boom bulge works its way past the college years, but there is now evidence for anticipating a long-term change in the supply-demand balance in the college job market.³ Even if social work programs continue to attract job-conscious students who are forsaking liberal arts majors, departmental politics are such that faculty allocations probably will not shift accordingly.

How feasible then is competency testing on the undergraduate level? The answer may lie in the extent to which advocates can lower the barriers of resistance. Academic disciplines have expressed little interest in competency-based education, and in that respect differ little from the manner in which organizations and professions have

greeted urgings for accountability. It is beyond the intent of this chapter to discuss the politics of implementing competency testing on a broad scale in social work education. However, even if the *notion* of competency-based education gains widespread acceptance, the testing process itself can be undermined unless it is designed to be administered with relative ease and minimal disruption. It is this concern that occupies us at the University of Montana, for a number of problems have arisen, as described in Chapters 6 and 7.

SOME UNDESIRABLE CONSEQUENCES

The route we have traveled thus far is the *work sample* approach. The students describe in a written document either their actual performance in the field or what they have drawn from the experience, depending on the question. Panels of examiners review the material submitted near the end of the practicum, tentatively rate each segment of the exam, then follow up with an oral session during which time the students defend their work. The final ratings are then assigned.

This system places a heavy demand on faculty time. Taking our hypothetical modal-sized program, where four faculty may have 60 students graduating per year, the use of two-person teams of examiners would mean that each faculty member would have responsibility for 30 students. If the field arrangement is concurrent, or if the block placement typically occurs in the final term, most of the exam will fall in a constricted time period. But even under the most propitious scheduling, the burden is heavy. In terms of a 40-hour week, the total time involved would consume two to three weeks per academic year. Such an investment of time might be more than most faculties would tolerate, and if the department required such an exam, it might be administered perfunctorily. This is one consequence of tying the exam to the field experience, which one must do if the work sample approach is followed.

A second consequence is the impact the exam has on the practicum. Field instructors report that toward the end of the practicum, the student's field learning is compromised by undue attention to preparing materials to be submitted to the exam committee. Whether or not the complaint is legitimate, it is being made with frequency and force. The instructors note in addition that their control over student time in the field has been weakened. Having the exam built upon the practicum also raises the question of who is ultimately responsible for the student's evaluation, and whether the exam committee can disengage its evaluation from an intrusive assessment of the field placement and supervision.

Perhaps the most questionable aspect of the work sample approach is that it places a severe limitation on the content of the exam. In other words, one is constrained to test primarily on what the student has actually been exposed to in the practicum. This approach works very well with dental hygienists, all of whom are required to scrape teeth and can be examined readily on this rationale of learning. Social work field instruction is not of this order. The nature of practicum assignments varies so widely as to challenge the notion that social work is one profession rather than several. Further, the relationship between field learning and classroom learning ("the gap") leaves much to be desired on an undergraduate level, given the heavy reliance on agency-based field instructors, some of whom have no training in social work.

Granted, the attraction the work sample approach offers is its face validity. As Armitage and Clark put it, quoting from *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*: "You say you know . . . flying. You know nothing till you prove it. Fly!"⁴ This is the greatest strength of examining work samples. But on closer inspection, do we actually observe the students "flying"? Hardly. What we have been examining in our own program is the student's self-report, geared to specific questions known far in advance. Students have admitted that they develop a rationale for their intervention strategies well after-the-fact, and there is reason to believe some do so in a contrived fashion. Anyone who has supervised students is familiar with the problems of clinical judgment on one hand and the matter of faithful reproduction in recording on the other.⁵

There is a remedy for this if we follow the work sample approach to the hilt, but the methodological problems are substantial. The use of direct observation or unobtrusive measures such as observation rooms or videotape are often impractical and seem to catch only a piece of practice. It is worth remembering at this point that the goal of most undergraduate programs is to produce a generalist. Interaction may occur on street corners and in board rooms.

In sum, the work sample approach is time-consuming, has a disruptive effect on the practicum, attempts to superimpose a comprehensive examination on a fragmentary experience, and relies on a self-report tailored to fit known questions. Additionally, this writer believes that the work sample approach does not go much beyond traditional field assessment. The only conceptual difference lies in the employment of an independent examining team.

AN ALTERNATIVE: CASE SITUATIONS

One alternative that holds promise is the case simulation approach.⁶ The beauty of this strategy is that the test designers can

plug in whatever conditions they wish to measure — engaging a reluctant client, forming a group, organizing an action system — and, if desired, keyed response categories can be furnished to the examiners in order to expedite and standardize scoring. True, we are not judging how well the student “flies,” but there are times when a Link Trainer is a better predictor of a pilot’s reactions to airborne contingencies than is actual flight behavior, short of elaborate war games where the other players are partially programmed.

A vignette is presented to the students, who describe in writing how they would proceed and why. The performance being tested is how well the students can apply learned knowledge to a hypothetical situation. *It is left to the practicum experience to assess how well the students behave under live conditions — a function that field instruction has always assumed.*

A repertoire of case simulations, with several alternate forms to minimize leakage effects, will yield coverage broader than any field experience. But the advantages do not end there. Since the exam items are not linked to the practicum, they can be presented to the students at any time following exposure to the relevant cognitive content. This means they can serve as exams within required courses, at a substantial saving of time. Team evaluations can be introduced at such points. Having segments of the competency examination injected into courses with team examiners will insure that the appropriate course content will indeed be taught.

Failure on an exam need not mean failure of the respective course, but students would be informed that they must pass that segment of the competency examination before graduation. The emphasis would be on bringing students to the point where they could pass all of the exams in stages. Having one comprehensive exam just prior to graduation poses a special “human factor” problem for students. There is great reluctance in our field to deny graduation to students, regardless of their performance. When counseling out occurs, it is typically for nonacademic reasons. This attitude has not been absent in our own faculty.

The case simulation approach need not be tied to vignettes; other forms of simulations or games might do, although the question of time consumption is always present. There would be problems to hurdle, and the development of a competency examination based on the case simulation approach ought to involve a national panel of experts.

REBUTTAL AND REJOINDER

In Chapter 3 Cummins suggests that simulations may also make a heavy demand upon faculty time. Due to the need for security and

breadth, "it may be necessary to develop a whole library of simulations."⁷ But the issue of security is not so formidable if we accept the notion that learning may be enhanced (and this is at bottom what testing is all about) if the student *does* know in advance what kind of test is in the offing. The work sample approach in fact relies on the student knowing exactly which items will comprise the test. Giving the correct responses is another matter. Security is more easily breached when students consult with the agency supervisor or liaison instructor regarding a case on which they will be examined. Opportunities for contamination abound with the work sample approach. On the other hand, classroom rating criteria on case situations are less likely to be shared with students.

As for the need to design simulations that will span the breadth of social work practice, Cummins is correct in observing that this task will require much effort and ingenuity. But the payoff could be substantial. In the attempt to grasp the essentials of practice (you can't test for everything), we may make some headway in defining core content. The work sample approach also attempts to boil down performance expectations to a relatively short list of items — given the potential universe — and the one-hour exam is a severe second-stage distillation.

The task of selecting representative simulations is complicated by the fact that much of social work learning is not sequential, as Arkava and Brennen observe in Chapter 1. We cannot hope to match the astrophysicist who asks that students calculate the orbit of a manned satellite and thereby tests for a host of subsidiary skills down to the level of being able to plug values into a formula. Much effort will be required to identify instances where the building blocks of social work knowledge fall one upon another. For example, knowing how to evaluate the effectiveness of an intervention requires prior ability to set realizable goals and knowledge of what assumptions are being made about the process of induced change. Knowing how to form an effective action system (in the Pincus-Minahan sense) presupposes some knowledge of organizational behavior and the political process.

The crucial point to bear in mind when comparing the work sample approach with simulations on time-consumption is that the demand on faculty *rating* time is at issue, not the time devoted to the development of the test. Test development can occur during slack periods, summer, or free evenings. Or, what is more likely, the tests can be imported.

While this critique is devoted mainly to feasibility concerns, the question of validity deserves at least brief mention here. The chapter on evaluation issues (Chapter 3) refers to Mischel's conclusion that

the postassessment environment should determine the methodology of assessment.⁸ This is the major underpinning for the work sample approach now employed at the University of Montana. However, there is room for honest disagreement as to what constitutes the postassessment environment for practitioners.

Social work is a problem-solving activity that includes mental manipulations separate from interactional behavior with clients or other persons. In fact, the practitioner often performs such manipulations in private. The conceptualization of the problem, the development of hypotheses, the selection of strategies and tactics for helping, the identification of potential resources, and so on are a major part of the postassessment (work) environment. This is particularly true for a social worker picking up a well-processed referral or a currently active case. There is very little difference between being briefed on what has already transpired and being presented with a vignette. The difference between actual work with clients and the problem-solving processes underlying this work is but one instance of the intellectual activity that takes place in all professional endeavors.

Of course the work sample approach also attempts to tap the student's underlying thought processes, but its advocates seem to ignore the fact that such processes are independent of behavior with clients, and, therefore, can be tested by other means. This independence is reflected in the parallelism of classroom learning and field learning, which causes difficulties, but long ago was chosen as an educational model in preference to apprenticeship training. As noted earlier, social work educators already assess field performance as a matter of course, and along dimensions similar to those used in the Montana Social Work Competency Scale. What we need now, it appears, is a testing approach that will focus on the student's thought processes, and do so in convenient fashion.

The work sample approach needs to be explored further before a final decision can be made regarding its potential use by social work educators. This writer would call for a *parallel* effort, with feasibility as the starting point. The problem of establishing validity remains, and no one can yet say which strategy among several will prevail. At the University of Montana we will continue to assess work samples because of their resemblance to actual practice, but we now plan also to introduce vignettes as a measure of competence. It is our hope that other programs will proceed with their own research so that the results will benefit all programs — and ultimately clients.

NOTES

1. The granting of accreditation was instituted in July 1974. Three years earlier, in July 1971, the Council on Social Work Education put into effect standards for approval.
2. This is an estimate by the writer in his capacity as a member of the Commission on Accreditation. The estimate is consistent with the data presented in Alfred Stamm, *An Analysis of Undergraduate Social Work Programs Approved by CSWE* (New York: Council on Social Work Education, 1972), p. 15. The estimate of a modal-sized program given in the following statement is based solely on that data.
3. Richard Freeman and Herbert Hollomon, "The Declining Value of College Going," *Change*, Vol. 7 (September 1975), pp. 24-31, and 62.
4. Andrew Armitage and Frank W. Clark, "Design Issues in the Performance-Based Curriculum," *Journal of Education for Social Work*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (Winter 1975), p. 24.
5. A review of studies involving the use of judgments in social work can be found in Scott Briar, "Family Services," in *Five Fields of Social Service: Reviews of Research*, ed. Henry S. Maas (New York: National Association of Social Workers, 1966), pp. 16-21. For a discussion on the use of case records see Ann W. Shyne, "Use of Available Material," in *Social Work Research*, ed. Norman A. Polansky (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), pp. 106-123. As Briar points out, the use of judgments of case record material constitutes judgments about other judgments.
6. The NASW document, *Guidelines for the Assessment of Professional Practice in Social Work* (New York: National Association of Social Workers, 1968), p. 28, refers briefly to simulated practice situations. The work sample approach is referred to as a "specimen of practice."
7. See p. 58.
8. See p. 51.

Chapter 9

Implications of Competency-Based Examinations for Undergraduate Education

by KAY L. DEA

What is true is often very trite. So it is with the statement that each journey must begin with a single step. The spectacular technological advances that have pushed mankind toward the stars and established a standard of living beyond the imagination of our forefathers all had their roots in the imperfect steps of individuals who dared to seek answers to the unknown. The progress of mankind always has been, and always will be, recorded in incremental stages. If greatness is to be achieved one must build upon the past.

The University of Montana has taken a major step in its quest to establish a competency-based examination to assure that students

who graduate in social work have those skills necessary for professional practice. The project was developed from the assumption that every educational institution has the responsibility to certify the competencies of its graduates. The need for social work educators to work cooperatively with professional organizations and practice agencies in certifying competency was recognized as crucial if social work is to maintain and enhance its professional status. Although the work accomplished to date is both incomplete and imperfect, it is also commendable and useful. One must hope that additional projects will build upon it.

Evaluative research in social work education is extremely difficult. Regardless if one is focused upon the assessment of student outcome or program effectiveness, it is much easier to describe the ideal processes and stages to be followed than actually to implement them. A host of questions, pitfalls, and obstacles stand ready to block the path of the most ambitious researcher. Let us look at some of the most pervasive tasks that this project had to address in terms of their implications for undergraduate education.

OBJECTIVES OF COMPETENCY-BASED EXAMINATIONS

Although competency-based examinations may be established solely for the purpose of assessing whether students have achieved the educational objectives of an institution, usually universities have employed them to address multiple objectives across a variety of areas. For example, they have provided useful information for curriculum development and decision making across all aspects of educational programs. Often they are used politically to satisfy the conditions of a government or foundation grant, or to convince university administrators that a program is legitimate. They may be used for accreditation purposes or for the justification of program expansion or increased funding. At times they have been incorporated into an educational program as tools for placing students in classes reflecting different levels of sophistication, or as tools for assessing whether particular requirements should be waived for selected students. The variety of different purposes for which evaluations can be used makes it imperative for researchers to specify in advance: Will this assessment serve multiple purposes? What information is needed? For whom and for what purposes?

Basically, the University of Montana limited its project to the assessment of student proficiency levels at the completion of the baccalaureate degree. The project had as a primary objective the establishment of quality controls at the point students exited from the

program. There was no systematic attempt to assess student competencies during the various stages of the program or to link specifically the presence of "terminal skills" to various components of the educational process. The project, then, was limited to a summative assessment of student competencies for practice without major concern for assessing the role of the institution in developing these competencies. From the standpoint of research this was not only legitimate but an appropriate way to limit the scope of the project to a manageable size.

In terms of education, however, these parameters imposed severe restrictions on the usefulness of the project for program assessment and development. Unfortunately, it is in this area that the needs of undergraduate education are most critical. Social work educators must have objective data to improve the rationality of their decisions regarding the content and structure of programs. It is not enough to know that students have achieved particular competencies. Instead, we must know why some students achieve and others do not. We must know which components of a program contribute most to achievement and which are ineffective or counterproductive. To accomplish these tasks it is necessary to develop conceptual models linking practice skills and curriculum content. It is necessary also to develop more sophisticated assessment tools and research strategies to link student outcome with educational input.

The research approach outlined and proposed by Cummins in Chapter 6 has the potential to resolve some of these problems. He recommends that assessment procedures be restructured into modules that can be linked to appropriate parts of the curriculum and distributed throughout the student's undergraduate program. I believe that serious consideration should be given to the adoption of this approach in future studies. In addition to its potential for strengthening competency-based testing, it could provide a structure for assessing the various components and stages of education in relation to their effectiveness for transmitting specific practice skills to student consumers. In addition, this approach could facilitate ongoing curriculum and program revisions necessary to meet the unique needs of different student groups. Finally, it could provide for a more efficient and economical use of educational resources by assuring that student progression in a program is contingent upon the sequential development of skills.

In relation to these objectives it is interesting to note that a number of individuals have suggested that a systems model for evaluation may be more useful than a goal model.¹ This approach recognized formally that all social programs, including education, tend to

have multiple goals and functions. Consequently they tend to be structured within the context of complex systems; they develop programs across complex administrative structures; and they tend to utilize a series of different program activities sequentially to achieve both formal and informal objectives. It is suggested, then, that evaluative designs must be structured to assess systematically each stage or logical series of activities that represent the basic components of a program. Since each phase of a program may pose a different set of problems and questions related to the assessment of competency, each stage may require different research tactics.

In recommending either this approach or other techniques to assure that institutions assess more than student competencies at the end of an educational program, I recognize that the detailed assessment of skills necessary for schools to certify that students are prepared to enter practice may be somewhat jeopardized. I question, however, if the detailed assessment for practice should be given priority by educational institutions. Since professional organizations and licensing boards are responsible for regulating practice it seems more appropriate that they assume responsibility for this activity. Certainly other professions have adopted this pattern.

Both law and medicine, for example, are distinguished by the board examinations they have established to police entrance into professional practice. This is a direction in which social work has moved as the National Association of Social Workers and other practice groups have pushed for the establishment of state licensing laws and competency examinations for professional certification. I believe that the profession must travel this road. Social work education should not be expected to certify professional practice competency. Rather, educators should assess the extent to which educational programs have achieved educational objectives.

Stake has suggested that educators need three kinds of data to evaluate educational programs in a utilitarian framework for program planning: (a) antecedent data describing those conditions that exist prior to the teaching and learning activities which may relate to outcomes; (b) transaction data related to the countless educational encounters between students, teachers, peers, counselors and other learning sources; and (c) outcome data related to the skills, abilities, and attitudes achieved by students through the educational experience. He suggested that multiple sources should be used to compile data across all three areas. In addition, it is necessary to consider *a priori* the way in which these data will be analyzed to assess causal and other relationships.²

Although the Montana project compiled both transaction and

outcome data, little attempt was made to specify in advance the way in which they might be used to assess program effectiveness. Transaction data were presented only in the form of general program and curriculum descriptions during the project. Almost no antecedent data were available to correlate outcome to such things as student characteristics at the time of admission. Again, from the standpoint of educational planning, it is recommended that more attention be given to these areas in future projects assessing student competency.

In making this recommendation, recognition is given to the fact that the project was credited with accomplishing major revisions in the social work curriculum. It appears, however, that this work was the result of a serendipitous Hawthorne Effect, in which research activities related to the assessment of competency spilled over into other areas of the school. Although this informal and loosely structured process for obtaining and using data in educational planning is useful, it has very different implications for the way in which assessment exams are structured than do more formal approaches in which there is a systematic attempt to obtain data for educational planning. In the latter case research procedures must assure the systematic compilation of data beyond a summative assessment of student skills.

SPECIFICATION AND DEFINITION OF PRACTICE COMPETENCIES

One of the most complex problems that confronts any group concerned with the assessment of practice competencies is that of defining the specific skills necessary for successful practice. In each of the chapters in this book, recognition has been given to the complexity of this task. For example, Arkava and Brennen suggest in Chapter 1 that the lack of clarity about educational objectives may reflect the general condition of the profession. They cite the following statement from Kadushin and Kelling:

Unless the profession is clear as to what it is the social worker does, the way he does it, and the ends such activities are designed to accomplish, schools of social work have no firm idea of what it is they should be teaching: they will have no clearly specified model of outcomes . . .

Cummins suggests in Chapter 3 that the most crucial shortcoming of the project may be the selection of criteria for competence in social work. He points out that any finite collection of criteria can only "approximate the ultimate ideal of competent social work practice." Spores and Cummings document the illusive and changing nature of competency expectations in Chapter 7 as they outline the

three or more curriculum revisions that were explicated during the course of the project.

The specification of competencies in practice is difficult. Historically social work has been guilty of trying to be all things to all people. Consequently, definitions of practice have tended to be global and diffuse. In addition, practice is not to be found as a simple entity. Social work is practiced across a variety of different fields, geared to the resolution of different problems that often require different methods and approaches. Finally, in recent years the profession has moved to sanction different levels of practice without clearly distinguishing the roles and responsibilities to be assumed at each level. Given the large number of programs that exist in practice and the variations that occur in staffing patterns, services, and role expectations across a conglomeration of shifting professional activities, it is not surprising that efforts to specify and describe practice competencies are often futile.

The University of Montana can take pride in the working definition of practice that was developed through this project. It is conceptually clear and professionally sound. Although it may not be exported easily to other schools because of differences in educational philosophies, goals, and regional practice demands, it serves as a useful model for defining generalist practice in a rural setting such as Montana. Most importantly for educational institutions, it demonstrates that practice can be defined in the context of skills to be mastered by students and that a rational model for practice can serve as a primary tool for integrating and synthesizing curriculum content areas.

I agree with Spores and Cummings that the distinctive characteristic of the emerging curriculum at Montana is the fact that content in each course flows in an organized and planful manner from competency expectations related to an explicit framework for practice. It is a sad commentary to note that this is not true generally of courses taught in other schools. Thus this curriculum model may be the most important contribution that the project will make to undergraduate education. It is certainly an approach that must be adopted by other schools if undergraduate education is to maximize its impact upon practice.

Approval of the general model adopted to describe practice competencies, however, should not be interpreted to suggest that the model is without problems or that it can be used universally across undergraduate education. On the contrary, no single model can meet the unique demands of every educational institution. In addition, every model must be capable of dynamic change as the peculiarities of time and circumstance dictate the need for new practice skills. It

is not enough to prepare students for practice in today's world. We must be prepared to mold and shape the practice of tomorrow and to respond to unanticipated developments in both practice and education. The flexibility of this model to respond to shifting demands must still be tested over time. It appears, however, that the model has been outlined with sufficient enough breadth and generality to assure its responsiveness to a changing world.

At the same time, the very breadth and comprehensiveness of the model may limit its usefulness as a research instrument for summative evaluations. Although the project staff concluded that the list of competencies could be handled easily in a summative exam, it seems difficult, if not impossible, in the context of a single exam to sample all of the skills outlined in the Montana Social Work Competence Scale. A general perusal of the competencies specified in the practice model reveals 121 items across 7 major areas. These items are incorporated into 91 questions and/or tasks in the competency scale. In addition, many skills must be demonstrated sequentially if the model is to maintain its integrity. Thus it is necessary not only to assess competency in numerous skill areas, but competency in the selection and packaging of skills sequentially and appropriately for diverse practice situations. The complexity of the task is staggering.

Paradoxically, the model also may be criticized for its lack of specificity. Many of the items are outlined in ambiguous terms subject to a variety of interpretations. For example, what constitutes positive services in the students' representation of an agency? Or how can we tell if students have demonstrated congruence between their own activities and overall agency purpose? Until these general behaviors can be specified and anchored with more concrete definitions and examples, it will be difficult to assure that faculty, students, and field instructors are interpreting these areas consistently.

Again, these problems may be resolved in part by moving to a series of competency examinations administered across the program rather than one summative evaluation at the end. This would allow for exams to focus comprehensively on specific skills at particular points in time, reducing the necessity to assess everything in one exam at the time students exit. The basic practice model would remain intact as a comprehensive guide for both curriculum development and competency assessment, but the competency scale itself would be replaced with a series of smaller, more focused, instruments.

Finally, in considering definitions of practice skill it should be noted that the project avoided a major pitfall that often entraps social work educators in assessing competencies, namely, the separation of knowledge and values from skills as though they exist apart in

practice activities. Knowledge, skills, and values must be integrated and synthesized in professional practice. To do otherwise reduces professional skills to techniques and professional workers to technicians. Harold Lewis recently commented on this dilemma:

When, as is the case in our literature, references are made to knowledge and skill — or knowledge, values and skill — support is given to the misleading notion that skill itself does not encompass knowledge and values. One unfortunate by-product of this erroneous view has been the prevalence of a belief that the cognitive and the emotive are separable in the act and the actors. Some have gone so far as to argue that different types inhabit our profession: the researchers or scientific types who do the thinking, and the artist or imaginative types who do the feeling. Unfortunately, such misleading formulations are very costly to the profession. They retard the development of sound education for practice.⁴

Lewis suggested that skills must be assessed across four dimensions: (a) knowledge to facilitate professional judgment and choices; (b) techniques, methods, or procedures to implement action; (c) values and philosophy to direct intent; and (d) individual, idiosyncratic styles. In his view knowledge, values, style, and action are essential dimensions of skills that need to be made understood jointly. To separate them is to run the risk of destroying them.

The need to integrate knowledge, skills, and values also has been expressed by Armitage and Clark. Citing unique problems encountered in developing performance-based behavioral objectives, they stated:

There is a general inference that on the one hand values are too mystical and philosophical to find expression in performance terms, and on the other hand that if an effective means of inculcating values could be devised it would be such a potentially dangerous behavioral device that it should be excluded from ethical practice — along with brainwashing and the lash.

We take a contrary view. Not only is it possible to develop performance criteria that express values, it is very desirable to do this. We consider it imperative that performance criteria express the central value commitments of the profession. The inclusion of these values in the statements of performance expectations serves to anchor them not in the realm of philosophical discussion but in the pragmatics of practice behavior.⁵

Although it is difficult to synthesize knowledge, skills, and values in social work education, it is a task that must be addressed. Given the complexities of practice, we fail our students if we leave knowledge in the form of "ivory tower theories" and values in the form of "abstract philosophy." Instead, we must demonstrate to our students that practitioners can apply knowledge and values in the context of

skills used to address the divergent problems that comprise practice. I believe that the development of competency-based examinations should help to correct this deficiency in social work education. Since these exams require the development of a performance-based curriculum, they force teachers and students alike to link the total social work curriculum to practice behaviors and skills.

MEASUREMENT OF PRACTICE COMPETENCIES

Three related questions confront educators as they attempt to measure skill competencies: (a) How can skills be translated into measurable behaviors that reflect professional practice? (b) What research instruments and procedures should be used to collect data? and (c) How should data be organized and analyzed? These questions must be addressed in conjunction with each other since solutions to one often affect the others.

The translation of skills into measurable behaviors is a subject that has been addressed by numerous individuals. Most noteworthy is the work of Mager. He suggested that three conditions must be met before skills can be measured effectively:

1. The behavioral objective must contain a description of observable behavior or an observable consequence of behavior (i.e., a product such as a paper) that will demonstrate mastery or attainment of the objective.
2. The behavioral objective must specify the criteria that will be used to evaluate the adequacy of attainment of the objective (exactly how the behavior is to be judged as adequate or inadequate).
3. The behavioral objective must specify the conditions under which the behavioral objective is to be demonstrated (time, place, other people, physical setting).⁶

These conditions are very difficult to meet in terms of practice. More often than not there is no single best approach to resolve the individual, family, or social problems that confront practitioners. Experts often disagree on the behavioral criteria that should be used to evaluate the adequacy of skill attainment, and the uniqueness of each practice episode makes it difficult to standardize the conditions under which behavioral objectives should be demonstrated. In addition, when one incorporates value components into performance criteria, one is confronted with major ambiguities surrounding the way in which broad philosophical values can be reduced to specific behaviors.

This raises the question: How specific should behavioral objectives be? It has been suggested already that the Montana Social Work Competence Scale may be outlined in terms that are too general for

faculty, students, and field instructors to interpret them consistently. Little attention is given within the scale to the explication of those particular behaviors that constitute successful performance in any of the areas outlined. In terms of exporting the scale to other social work programs or standardizing evaluative criteria, this is a serious limitation. Yet one is confronted with the dilemma that the continued specificity of practice behaviors could lead to an unwieldy instrument of enormous size and triviality. In addition, it could tend to minimize and destroy those independent judgments and styles that are the hallmark of each practitioner. Lewis has stated:

of all the attributes of skill, style alone asserts the individuality of the practitioner in an unmistakable, not easily compromised fashion . . . How to tolerate the widest range of distinctive styles while curtailing the excesses of individual styles whose influence is destructive of goals and purposes is a question social work must address.⁷

To abandon style and judgment, of course, is to abandon professional practice. The question of how far one can subdivide complex behaviors into component parts before one risks transforming professional education into technical and vocational training is not easy to answer. It is one that will need to be addressed individually by each educational institution as linkages are made between curriculum objectives and outcome assessment.

A major methodological position taken by the staff at the University of Montana was that student assessments should be conducted as far as possible in the actual context of practice. This position was developed in detail by Cummins and is supported in his literature review. The position is based upon the premise that practice skills are expressed in part in response to the situational context in which they are applied. Consequently, it is desirable to test skills "on the job" where situational variables are not manufactured or contrived. It is recognized also that students can demonstrate academic knowledge about a skill without possessing the skill itself or the ability to use the skill appropriately in the context of real-life situations. Thus if students claim that they can practice social work, they must prove it by practicing.

Although this position is conceptually sound, the myriad problems associated with testing student competencies within the context of practice led project staff to substitute on-the-job assessments with student reports of activities performed in fieldwork. It was presumed that this work sample approach would closely approximate on-the-job assessments since it would continue to focus upon activities performed by students in practice.

I disagree with this assumption. I believe that student reports of fieldwork practice basically reflect academic skills related to the selection, organization, and presentation of data. Moreover, the work sample approach utilized at Montana requires students to present materials in the form of written documents comparable to the formal papers commonly associated with academic assessments. As Brennen suggests in Chapter 8, this reliance upon student recall of practice situations is subject to selective perception, selective reporting, and the development of contrived or after-the-fact explanations of intervention strategies. Thus the Montana Social Work Competence Scale may measure academic skills more effectively than it measures practice skills.

Additional problems related to the work sample approach are outlined by Brennan. I agree with his summary that "the work sample approach is time-consuming, has a disruptive effect on the practicum, attempts to superimpose a comprehensive examination on a fragmentary experience, and relies on a self-report tailored to fit known questions."⁸

The alternative approach proposed by Brennen has much promise. He suggests the use of case situations in the form of standardized vignettes to assess competency at various stages of the program. These vignettes would be packaged in the form of tests designed to simulate various practice situations. They could be used independently or within the context of required courses. Since they would minimize the idiosyncracies related to the unique cases students carry in fieldwork, they could assure a more systematic assessment of practice skills. Further, they would tend to force students to demonstrate social work skills in the context of the exam, rather than to write about them or to talk about them in a reconstructed fashion.

Competency-based examinations that focus upon specific skills at multiple points in the educational process have additional potential advantages for undergraduate education. In the hands of a creative faculty they can assist in student advisory and academic counseling by providing information about student strengths and weaknesses; they can open the educational process to differential time tables by allowing students to move from one skill area to another at their own pace; they can create a climate of nonfailure by providing opportunities for repeated competency testing and by encouraging students to focus upon the mastery of skills rather than the achievement of grades; and they can open the traditional curriculum to innovative patterns in the sequencing and integration of content by linking content to competency skills rather than specific courses. These potential advantages suggest that the goal of developing competency-based

examinations is one that should be pursued by all educational institutions.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In summary, the Montana project is a creative and much-needed move in the direction of assessing student competencies for professional practice. The demands for educational accountability that exist in today's world make it imperative for other schools to develop similar competency examinations. It is exciting to contemplate the significant role that these exams can play in developing and strengthening undergraduate education. In addition to assuring some degree of quality control in the skills students possess at the time of graduation, they may be potent tools in the following areas:

1. Assisting in the development of competency-based curricula in which content flows in an organized and planful manner from competency expectations related to an explicit framework for practice.
2. Assisting in curriculum planning and program coordination across all areas of social work education.
3. Assisting in the educational evaluation of program effectiveness by linking student outcome with educational input at various stages of the educational program.
4. Assisting the profession to delineate tasks and responsibilities at differential levels of practice.
5. Assisting in the individualization of students within the educational process.

Competency examinations, however, can also present problems. Thus it is necessary to take certain precautions in their development. Of particular concern is the need to assure that a focus upon skill assessment does not lead to skill training in the tradition of vocational and technical programs. Professional skills must integrate and synthesize components of knowledge, techniques, values, and style. Care must be taken to avoid fragmenting these skill components as instruments are developed to measure competencies.

It is necessary also to assure that performance-based objectives do not stifle educational innovations, faculty and student creativity, or the ability of programs to respond to differential learning needs. This is a hazard that must be treated seriously since competency-based programs tend to focus attention and resources on a definitive set of professional skill objectives. Under certain circumstances these objectives could place both faculty and students in an academic straight-jacket.

Similarly, it is important to maintain effective liaison with community agencies and professional organizations to assure that educational programs and competency examinations reflect the changing climate in which social work is practiced. We must prepare our students not only to live in today's world, but to adjust to a changing world in which specific technologies and skills may become obsolete.

Finally, precautions should be taken to assure that we do not lose sight of the students we are preparing for practice. We must never become so involved in the development of exams and other educational processes that we forget that these educational tools are justified only as they serve the growth of students. In another place I have said that "we have chosen to participate directly in the shaping of social work students as they progress toward intellectual, physical, social and professional maturity. Let it never be said of us that we failed to respect their dignity as human beings."

In conclusion, recognition must be given to the extensive materials the University of Montana has compiled in the process of developing competency examinations. Research issues, problems, and strategies related to the evaluation of skills are addressed in considerable detail. The impact of introducing competency examinations into the social work program is analyzed in terms of the curriculum and program changes that occurred during the project as well as the reactions of students, faculty, and field instructors to these changes. Major strengths and limitations of the project are assessed in terms that can assist the reader to avoid similar pitfalls and to identify alternative approaches to specific methodological problems.

This information can be helpful to other schools and individuals who seek to develop similar exams. There is an old fable about a grasshopper who consulted a wise owl because he suffered from the terrible cold each winter. The owl listened to his story patiently and prescribed a solution: "Simply turn yourself into a cricket and hibernate during the winter." Later the grasshopper returned to confess that he did not know how to accomplish this metamorphosis. He asked for additional advice. The owl replied, "Look, I gave you the principle, it's up to you to work out the details."

To a large extent the University of Montana has provided social work educators with a foundation of principles and other materials for assessing student competencies. It is our responsibility to work out the details as we build upon this foundation. I hope that we can rise to this responsibility.

NOTES

1. See, for example, Amitai Etzioni, "Two Approaches to Organizational Analysis: A Critique and a Suggestion," *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (1960), pp. 257-78; and Perry Levison, "Evaluation of Social Welfare Programs: Two Research Models," *Welfare in Review*, Vol. 4, No. 10 (1966), pp. 5-12.
2. Robert E. Stake, "The Countenance of Educational Evaluation," *Teachers College Record*, Vol. 68, No. 7 (April 1967), pp. 523-40.
3. See p. 9.
4. Harold Lewis, "The Essence of Social Work Skills" (Paper presented at the NASW Annual Symposium, Hollywood-by-the-Sea, Florida, October 1975).
5. Andrew Armitage and Frank W. Clark, "Design Issues in the Performance-Based Curriculum," *Journal of Education for Social Work*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (Winter 1975), p. 25.
6. Robert F. Mager, *Preparing Instructional Objectives* (Belmont, Calif.: Fearon Publishers, 1962), p. 12.
7. Lewis, *op. cit.*
8. See p. 130.
9. Kay L. Dea, *The Instructional Module* (New York: Council on Social Work Education, 1971), p. 36.

Chapter 10

The Montana Experience:

A Critical Analysis

by LEWIS W. CARR

The faculty of the University of Montana Department of Social Work are to be commended for undertaking two significant and extremely difficult tasks. The first is developing and implementing competency-based education for the department's baccalaureate social work program; the second is developing and executing an assessment of this program by measuring its outcomes, that is, the competency of student social workers. It is refreshing to see evaluation linked with educational innovation in social work. While the success to date may be regarded as limited, clearly such efforts inevitably contribute

to advancement and refinement in social work education, which leads to more competent social workers at all levels.

In reviewing the Montana report, a number of issues are raised, several of which are to be considered here. Principally, my analysis will focus on (1) the formulation of the problem and the research strategy employed, (2) implications of the competency-based education movement for social work education, and (3) consideration of alternate strategies for accountability in social work education.

ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENT AND EVALUATION PROCEDURES

The first set of issues relate to the formulation of the problem for study and the research approach used, that is, the assessment instrument and procedures used to evaluate the program. Cummins does an excellent job in Chapter 3 of reviewing evaluation alternatives wherein the basis is laid for the choice between simulation and work sample approaches. The pros and cons of the various alternatives are carefully considered as well as the state of the art related to instrumentation. The sensitivity to the realities of field research is clear as well as a commitment to assess the students in terms of their competencies as reflected in actual practice. Reference is made in Chapter 4 to the National Association of Social Workers' (NASW) report, *Guidelines for the Assessment of Professional Practice in Social Work*, wherein similar issues were considered. As a member of the committee that prepared the report I felt a strong sense of empathy with the University of Montana. While one is strongly drawn to the criterion-related measurement procedures based on practice in a real situation, there are a host of problems associated with this approach. As it was, the NASW committee ultimately settled on a combination of a standardized objective examination and reference forms that evaluated career patterns and quality of work performance based on peer evaluations. I tip my hat to Montana for moving on to a somewhat more direct assessment of practice, that is, an examination of a practice situation involving the actual work of the student social worker.

Following is a consideration of the questions and concerns that came to my mind as I reviewed the Montana report. First of all, it would have been strengthened if it had defined and conceptually specified more adequately the program and issues of competency-based education in an undergraduate social work program. There was certainly more than adequate discussion of the need for accountability in social work education, with which I would not argue. However, the specification of competency-based education seems limited to the broad formulation of three elements set forth by Armitage and Clark.

This limitation is particularly bothersome in view of the strong and startling statement in Chapter 1: "So the *raison d'être* for social work education is the student's performance of certain professional social work tasks."¹ This suggests an educational thrust given to developing specific sets of competencies that are primarily technique- and task-oriented. This reviewer is left to speculate whether the product of such a program will be a technician locked into a limited set of specific abilities and thus restricted as a professional.

Furthermore, I sensed there was recognition of the potential limitation of competency-based education when acknowledgement was given to the views of Bruner and Blackey, which advance teaching fundamentals rather than technology, and the interrelatedness of ideas rather than a narrow focus on facts alone.² However, these views were not developed or considered in terms of the competency-based approach. Rather, they were dropped and the spotlight shifted to the focus on the behaviors only of the learner.

Chapter 1 concludes on a note for which there no doubt would be general agreement, that is, the value of research-based decisions. In this, one can see what may be an attractive and major strength of the competency-based educational approach — the focus on behaviors as outputs and using measures of such behaviors as indicants by which to assess the effectiveness of the educational effort.

Moving on to Chapter 3, Cummins' excellent examination of the evaluation issues was comprehensive and highlighted the difficulties associated with educational evaluation in a practice profession. On the one hand it would appear that one of the virtues of competency-based education is that it is compatible with evaluation design; but on the other hand the problem of settling on the appropriate level of specificity of behavioral objectives poses serious threats to appropriate evaluative efforts. It would appear that, as was pointed out, the greater the specificity of the behavioral objectives, the larger will be the set of behaviors that constitutes the total outcome of the competency-based educational efforts.

With greater specificity there is the opportunity for precision, but feasibility becomes an even greater problem. Greater specificity allows for more clearly identifiable elements lending themselves to measurement. Correspondingly, with great specificity there is a rapid increase in the number of elements to be measured. This is clearly recognized by Cummins, who poses two alternatives, either to select a sample of behaviors from a large collection or else state the objectives at a more abstract and inclusive level.

Given the obvious limitations of both approaches I was left with the feeling that perhaps competency-based education and the concomitant evaluation requirement are not feasible given the current

state of the art. If the specific behaviors that are the objectives of the educational program cannot be determined at the appropriate level of specificity then a critical component of the program is inoperable. This left the reviewer with the working position that the competency-based curriculum is not appropriate for professional education. This seems especially so when one's profession calls for a complex interplay of knowledge, techniques, and value judgments. These are expected to be integrated into some pattern of behaviors out of a potential variety of behaviors. There is no one set pattern that is correct since the complex interplay for a given social worker under a certain circumstance could result in a set of behaviors that would differ from those of another social worker and yet both would achieve the same or comparable outcomes. Which set of behaviors would be the criterion by which to judge the effectiveness of the educational preparation?

The seeming specificity and objectivity of the competency-based curriculum may offer false assurances of more effective preparation for professional practice. This, along with the reservation expressed earlier that this type of educational program may result in a more technician-like social worker, set the stage for my review of the findings. I took the stance of looking forward with a questioning eye at the findings of the University of Montana experience to see if their empirical findings would refute my doubts and reservations and would support the contentions of the advocates of competency-based education. With this in mind, I carefully reviewed the assessment procedure in Chapter 4 as well as the results of the assessment as reported in Chapter 5.

Apparently the faculty made an heroic effort to initiate "a near instantaneous evaluation program" and yet to their credit they carefully built-in the definition of the criteria base for assessment. This instrument-independent statement of the criteria of social work practice skills serves as the base for assessing graduates. This was a commendable as well as a necessary move. However, the criteria were set at a level of abstraction that was not behavior-specific. This middle-level of abstraction was apparently the level that was regarded as the best trade-off between specificity and feasibility. The list of competence criteria seemed to be a comprehensive and appropriate coverage of competencies, but as acknowledged by Cummins, the list "does not achieve the level of behavioral specificity recommended by most competency-based education advocates."¹ In addition to the lack of specificity, there is the problem of overlapping categories and reliance on subjective judgments.

The instrument developed and used, the Montana Social Work Competence Scale (MSWCS), and the procedure of self-selected case presentations and records open up additional areas for consideration.

It is clear that the implementation of the assessment procedure was another heroic effort. One can view with respect and appreciation the effort required, but there is the stark reality that the ratings of behaviors were based on ten global areas requiring judgments based on a chain of inferences far removed from the specific practice behaviors. This approach is reasonable enough given the state of the art, but it is a major exception to the requirements for the evaluation of competency-based education.

Cummins' careful examination of the MSWCS in Chapter 6 reflects technical competence in determining the adequacy of the instrument. While the reliability of the instrument seems satisfactory, there is limited evidence regarding its validity. Clearly, as is acknowledged by Cummins, the instrument is in the developmental state. The biggest limitation resides in its lack of specificity at the level of social work practice skill and competencies.

Given Cummins' incisive discussion of the limitations of assessment and particularly the MSWCS as an instrument, I return to my earlier point, which questioned whether the state of the art is such that there can be assessments at the level of specific practice behaviors. The Montana experience has served only to deepen my reservation about competency-based education. I have not seen the specific procedures required to measure the attainment of specific behavioral objectives. While saying this I would also note and agree with Cummins that other efforts at evaluation of social work education programs have not been especially encouraging. All that can be said is that the Montana experience does not offer a respite from the general picture of limited efforts and limited means to evaluate social work curricula adequately. Much of the limitation lies within the state of the art.

However, while the objective findings are limited and at best inconclusive, apparently the move to a competency-based baccalaureate social work curriculum has been a source of academic ferment. The well-done description of the curriculum development by Spores and Cummings in Chapter 7 and its impact on students and faculty as well as the concerns that surfaced, reveal a lively faculty actively involved in advancing social work education. One can easily sense the excitement, frustration, searching, and many meetings that went into the design and building of a new curriculum as well as putting into place an evaluation system and other support systems. Clearly one senses a curriculum in process and the dynamic involvement and commitment of the social work faculty in this demanding venture.

IMPACT ON GRADUATE SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

Such curriculum endeavors will have a significant influence on graduate social work education. First of all, there will be increasing

pressure by graduate students for a greater precision and specificity in the statement of educational objectives. Increasing sophistication and greater preparation on the part of graduate students will have a positive, upgrading effect. Secondly, the students will look for and expect more direct linkages between theory and practice skills, techniques, and strategies. A greater immediacy of learning and application can be expected to be emphasized. The locus of learning will tend more to be in the practice situation. A third development that may evolve is a greater emphasis on practice simulation in the classroom wherein practice theory and concepts can be analyzed as they are applied in a controlled situation intended to approximate reality. The immediacy and feedback elements of such learning would seem to be developments in graduate social work education that could flow from competency-based undergraduate social work education.

While these are areas wherein there can be further innovation and progressive development, there are potential problems that need to be dealt with. These relate to what I regard as a potential limitation of the competency-based program, that is, an orientation that is more on the level of technical competence at the expense of a more generalized but comprehensive grounding of social work knowledge and values. Furthermore, it may produce students oriented to a limited set of techniques, whose skills may make them less responsive to varied situations. Graduate social work education can respond to this by maintaining and increasing attention to the theory base and alternate interventive strategies of social work.

On balance, the advent of undergraduate social workers trained in competency-based programs probably will carry into graduate programs students with significantly higher levels of practice competence. Furthermore, this development will facilitate shortening the time required for graduate education. For those who enter directly into practice, they may be expected to assume practice responsibilities more quickly. However, whereas traditionally educated undergraduates may need staff development activities focused on skill development, the competency-based undergraduates may need staff development activities focused on knowledge-based assessment and interventive strategies.

ALTERNATE METHODS OF ACCOUNTABILITY

In concluding this analysis I would like to suggest briefly a direction — which, while not as dramatic as an overall design of curriculum — may offer further insights into the process of social work education as well as provide for more definitive research. While the research plan for the assessment of the Montana program was com-

prehensive, there were profound difficulties associated with the summative evaluation effort, which used a broad range of relatively global objectives and a design without control or comparison groups. It may be of greater value in the long run if the research effort could be redirected to take on a more microscopic approach.

By the microscopic approach I have in mind a combination of formative evaluation focused on more specific learning activities and outcomes temporally evaluated over short time-spans rather than at the traditional terminal points, that is, mid-term exams, final exams, graduation, and so on. Research more focused on specific activities and outcomes lends itself to more feasible as well as more objective, reliable, and valid measures. Over a period of time this could create a foundation of more discrete findings, which when accumulated could be woven into an empirically tested theoretical base that could serve as a foundation for the broader summative evaluation research. In addition, such an approach would lead to the development of more specific measurement strategies and instruments and improve the state of the art in educational evaluation at the professional level. Such outcomes, while not very dramatic or sweeping, would be in the service of improving accountability in social work education.

While some of my observations may have sounded harsh and unduly critical, it is to be noted that my points were recognized and acknowledged by the authors themselves. Overriding my critical remarks is the deep respect and appreciation I have for the faculty and students of the University of Montana in this most ambitious venture. I look forward to future reports as they move forward in developing their undergraduate social work program using the competency-based educational model.

NOTES

1. See p. 16.
2. See p. 18.
3. See p. 72.

Chapter 11

The Montana Experience: Practice Perspectives

by DAVID M. KAPLAN

The principle task for this reviewer is to assess the University of Montana's program of competency-based education for social work from the perspective of practice. Because my comments will reflect my own particular slice of social work practice, I think it is appropriate to indicate that my experience has been in the areas of casework, research, and administration, in family, child welfare, psychiatric, and medical settings.

The arguments advanced by the Montana faculty for assessing the quality of professional practice are, by now, familiar ones and well-grounded. The need for objective evaluation of outcome stems,

in part, from failure to demonstrate an association between educational methods and measured learning of later practice. Professional assessment comes from the growth of accountability demands, both from inside and outside the profession. The push for social work licensure and vendor privileges also exerts its influence. The criticism of schools in their student preparation for practice, coming from practice agencies, is also cited, as is the need of social workers' evaluating themselves to avoid nonprofessionals like managerial personnel doing the job for them.

CRITERIA FOR EVALUATING PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE

The current social work concern over how to evaluate professional competence focusses on the issue of whether assessment should be based on what is put into educational programs, inputs, or what comes out of them, outputs. The Montana program clearly sides with objective outcome evaluation, that is, assessing the graduates' competence by rating samples of their fieldwork practice.

Certainly, input evaluations have dominated social work evaluative efforts to date, whether the preoccupation has been with assessing individual capabilities and attributes, value or knowledge inventories, or with various aspects of teaching methods such as curriculum content, faculty qualifications, or class format.

More recently, Levy, who also argued in favor of input evaluation of practice, stressed the importance of the consumer in this process. He pointed out that "the social worker's attempts (to realize outcome) . . . will be valid to the extent that (he) is addressing himself to the needs or problems with which clients are seeking the social worker's help as they (the clients) see the need for it."¹ Levy contended correctly that the clients' contribution of what is wrong is an essential ingredient in the professional assessment of practice. All professionals have a tendency to decide what is good for their clients without checking to find out whether their consumers agree with them.

The more specialized a profession becomes, the more it is apt to become preoccupied with technical considerations that can be appreciated only by other specialists and not by the layman. The tendency of professionals to seek confirmation of their competence from peers includes a proclivity to ignore the patients' evaluation of their practice. Social workers must guard against these myopic attitudes. It is important to remember that George Bernard Shaw once described a profession as a conspiracy against the public.

As important as consumer input may be in evaluating practice, it is still only one factor among many that should be considered. Per-

haps the most useful view of evaluation is that it should consist of a balance of input and output criteria. Input and output criteria are not mutually exclusive and we should not be forced to make "either-or" decisions in this argument. In any case, whether our biases dispose us to favor input or output evaluation, it is high time we paid more attention to those, like the Montana faculty, who are developing objective measures for evaluating professional competence. Outcome assessment has been a neglected component in social work competence evaluation. It deserves much more support and thought than we have devoted to it thus far.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

What are some implications for practice of the Montana competency-based educational model? I have a number of comments on some of the potential benefits and risks that may emanate from this program. The attempt to assess the practice of beginning BA social work graduates by objective criteria should provide an impetus for similar evaluations of the practice of *all* social workers, as an *ongoing* professional responsibility. The extent to which the Montana program will have such a transfer effect depends, as Brennen notes in Chapter 8, on the ready replicability of the program at other schools. Feasibility, therefore, is a prime consideration.²

The definition of educational objectives in the Montana program specifies its primary goal as "the development of generalist practitioners who possess competencies fostering effective intervention in a variety of problem situations."³ In my opinion, this definition of practice as a problem-solving process is a sound one in which "methods" are assigned to their proper perspective as instruments in the service of problem resolution — a view with which specialists may quarrel. Specialists become so identified with particular methods that, like surgeons, they have a tendency to recommend their specialty overfrequently as a solution to most problems. Among surgeons such a tendency contributes significantly to the sizeable number of unnecessary surgical procedures performed in the United States. By much the same process, social work method specialists tend to view their particular specialties as the preferred answer to most of the client's problems. The available evidence does not support the efficacy of such specialist claims among social workers any more than it does in medicine.

For the reasons cited above, the recommendation of the Council on Social Work Education's Task Force on Structure and Quality in Social Work Education that generalist practice should become the province of the BA graduate bothers me. As one who observes social

work practice in a complex medical center, I have learned to prize those social workers who have multiple skills (case and groupwork, community organization, or research and teaching) and who know how to use them appropriately to solve problems. I find myself in agreement with those who wonder whether the social worker "with the more advanced degree (should not) acquire and utilize a more comprehensive repertoire of skills for generalist practice . . ."⁴

The Montana program's definition of practice, including the contextual components within which problem-solving efforts occur, is one that I find very congenial. The scope of activities included under the practice rubric is sufficiently broad so that it does not restrict the wide variety of practices that social work encompasses. I think it is important that contextual components have been made explicit so that they can be taught deliberately. My generation was not made as aware of organizational, community, and professional influences in practice. Many of us had to learn the hard way that practice does not take place in a vacuum.

From the account of the development of the Montana program it is very clear that such an enterprise makes a school's curriculum highly responsive to practice examinations. Such a practice-oriented program should do much to reduce the criticism that agencies level at the schools in their preparation of graduates for practice. It is, however, necessary to offer the caveat that a strong orientation to practice evaluation may turn the curriculum away from offering important basic knowledge courses that are not as obviously related to practice as are "how-to" courses geared to helping students pass qualifying exams. There is considerable indication in the Montana experience that the students' reactions to the qualifying exam included demands that each course prove its value by helping students pass the exam.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH

From a research point of view there are a number of comments one can make about the Montana program. First, the authors should be complimented for a very lucid, self-critical presentation of the decisions that were made in formulating their program. One of the attractive features of their report lies in its balanced view and in the authors' explicit recognition of the strengths and weaknesses of each of the different competence assessment models that are reviewed, including value and knowledge inventories, skill assessment scales, simulated models, live situational tests, and the practice outcome model designed by the Montana faculty.

Cummins argues persuasively in Chapter 3 that the best measure of professional competence is in the assessment of practice itself. He

stresses the importance of situational factors and Mischel's premise that behavior is influenced considerably by the "evoking situation."⁵ Cummins' claim that the context of assessment (fieldwork practice) should come as close as possible to the postassessment environment (actual practice) seems well-founded.

As for the difficult job of specifying those skills required to ensure competent practice, Cummins recommends devising the best criteria one can, one that will approximate practice as closely as possible. The Montana group recommends a work sample approach as the most reasonable in assessing outcome, along with a supplementary instrument involving field supervisors to assess the student's ability to form client relationships. The written and oral work sample exam admittedly does not accomplish a good evaluation of "relationship" practice skills.⁶

The Montana model deliberately stresses the cognitive process that is involved in practice. Thinking is implicit in practice behavior and can be teased out afterward, even if practitioners are unaware of this process during their interventions. It is refreshing to be reminded that social work practice involves thinking, after years of "feeling" our way. Cognition has been downgraded for too long by social workers and not given its rightful place.

There are a number of practical problems in developing a competency program at the undergraduate level. One of the obvious difficulties is the limited time period in which the student participates in the field experience. The brief practice period forces the exam to be a single, summative test coming at the end of the educational experience. The authors clearly realize that the timing of the exam generates much anxiety among the students. If the practicum experience is unavoidably time-limited, some way of spreading out the exam in stages, over the entire learning experience, must be found. Perhaps, as Brennen suggests in Chapter 8, the use of simulated cases can be tied to individual courses as an additional test procedure.⁷ The post-graduate fieldwork experience extending over two years would make it much easier to spread a practice-oriented exam over a broader time span.

Arkava and Brennen, in their discussion of some of the critical issues involved in developing an instrument to measure competence in Chapter 1, pose the following question: "How (do) we decide what is the correct answer to a situation?"⁸ Again, "the validity issue requires attention because even if consensus is reached among professionals — which simply may be a function of training — those responses rated as right may not truly improve the quality of social work services."⁹

How is it possible to judge competence if we do not know the

"correct" answer to a situation? There may be several answers to this question — both short- and long-range. If, indeed, we do know what the correct answers are in certain situations, but haven't made them explicit, we should try to clarify them. If we do not have the correct answers yet, we must arrive at what we believe to be correct answers, if only by expert consensus. And finally, the long-range solution to finding the correct answer must come *through evaluative research of our interventions themselves* — at the most sophisticated levels of practice.

There seems to be little alternative to arriving at correct answers except by testing social work interventions in classic, scientific fashion. We must increase the verified knowledge of psychosocial problems whether the focus is on individuals, groups, or social systems. And that means submitting knowledge and skills to scientific tests on randomly assigned groups of clients.

There are many reasons for overcoming the reluctance to "stick our necks out" in this fashion, not the least of which is the need to develop feedback mechanisms that will keep us honest about how well interventions really work. Without such feedback there is little incentive to change interventions and we can blissfully assume that all is well with practice when, in fact, it is not.

There are many ways we can fool ourselves without objective evaluations. How often do we take credit for solving problems that spontaneously resolve themselves, for example, as with grief reactions? How often do we pretend that we have achieved cures of chronic problems (with as yet unknown etiologies) when in fact we have not "cured" such problems, for example, as with addictions, chronic marital problems, or long-term parent-child problems?

SUMMATION

The Montana program report is a timely one. It comes when social workers are beginning to think seriously about assessing the quality of practice. The report gives us something to sink our teeth into, for the authors have, in fact, done something about evaluating practice.

Whether the practice sample approach provides us with the answer to professional assessment is, perhaps, less important than the fact that this group offers us a clear, exceedingly useful theoretical framework with which to address further evaluative efforts. The problem-solving definition of practice formulated by the Montana faculty is broad enough to encompass the diversity of practice without sacrificing its complexities in favor of unreal oversimplifications.

NOTES

1. Charles S. Levy, "Inputs Versus Outputs as Criteria of Competence," *Social Casework* (June 1974), p. 378.
2. See p. 127.
3. See p. 98.
4. Editorial, "Changes in Education Will Change Practice," *Social Work*, Vol. 20, No. 5 (September 1975), p. 342.
5. See p. 50.
6. See p. 102.
7. See p. 130.
8. See p. 13.
9. See p. 15.

PART IV

A Competency-Based Curriculum Case Example

Chapter 12

The University of Calgary Experience: A Case Example

by FRANK W. CLARK

This chapter describes how the faculty of social welfare at the University of Calgary implemented a competency-based program at the BSW level. The case example was chosen to illustrate how the program's organizational characteristics, the faculty, and the administration influenced the progression of curriculum revision. Along with serving as a springboard for discussion and planning in other schools, an analysis of the developmental process at Calgary may be helpful to other faculties considering the adoption of a competency-based curriculum, because it highlights many of the problems and issues that attend major curriculum change.

IMPLEMENTING THE CALGARY COMPETENCY-BASED PROGRAM

Implementation of a competency-focused curriculum will pose unique challenges corresponding to the particular characteristics of each program. However, it may be useful to examine one school's attempt to adopt a competency-focused program, as an illustration of the common problems produced by such an effort.

The University of Calgary recently developed a four-year BSW degree. Students were admitted to the first two years of the program in September 1971, and the first graduates emerged in November 1973, having accelerated their progress through attending summer sessions. The program presently admits students to degree-seeking status in the second year. Briefly, the student's first year is primarily a general liberal arts university education. While several social work courses are offered at this level, they are developed for the university at large and portray various aspects of the scope and functions of social welfare and social work.

The second-year design is a series of integrated experiences and simulations that provide foundation studies and an introduction to practice objectives, demands, and needs. A basic objective is to assist students to become self-directed, participatory learners. The third-year thrust is toward intensive professional skill-building at a generic practice level. In addition to a first methods-practice sequence, students are involved in the study of social provision, interventive models, and scientific evaluation procedures.

The fourth and final year offers a series of experiences designed to provide students with structured opportunities for a more focused type of practice within the generic, full-range context. Refinement of practice skills, more specialized topics related to fields of interest, and courses designed to bridge the student's more narrowly circumscribed area of study and the broad backdrop of social work and social welfare are the major components of this fourth year.

The standing internal administrative structure of the school is streamlined and contains a School Council, an Academic Policy and Program Committee, a Student Affairs Policy Committee, and a general Administrative Committee chaired by the dean or his designate. The basic educational goal of the program is "the preparation of a graduate who is ready for initial entrance into professional social work practice."¹

Objectives of the BSW program evolved over the first two-and-one-half years from a broad statement that characterized the prior professional degree program at the MSW level, to a series of more specific statements that are presented below.

It is our intention that the graduate, placed in a situation where his professional helping services are needed, is:

- a. Able to observe the characteristics of the presenting situation and is able to summarize these in writing and orally;
- b. Able to maintain awareness of the major analytical parameters to be considered in identifying the sources and manifestations of that situation and is able to report the analysis;
- c. Able to be responsive to the intellectual and emotional impact of the situation on the other(s) affected by it;
- d. Able to initiate a relationship with the other(s) which sustains the helping action to facilitate a process of further access into the situation;
- e. Able, where appropriate, to bring relevant resources to bear or able to proceed in obtaining knowledge of resources;
- f. Able to make a preliminary determination of the succeeding course of action, and to introduce it.

In the above, the student is expected to demonstrate these abilities without need of external help, e.g. supervision. The student is not expected to have these abilities for all situations, but either for help to individuals, families or small groups, or for help with subcommittees, intergroups or communities.

The graduating student, in the area of his concentration, in a situation in which initial actions have led to the conclusion that a continuing service is to be provided, is:

- a. Able to sustain relationship apposite to helping roles selected;
- b. Able to apply knowledge of social work practice roles, selecting roles consciously and on the grounds of sanction, pertinence and feasibility and is able to report and explain this process;
- c. Able to establish clear understanding with other(s) on respective expectations and responsibilities;
- d. Able to relate issues that arise in the helping process to agency and social policy and resources, taking action to inform and influence the pertinent social structure when policy and resources are deficient or harmful;
- e. Able to determine when other professions, organizations, persons should be involved or should assume responsibility;
- f. Able to allow client self-determination within the constraints of law and interpersonal responsibility;
- g. Able to work effectively within a team when service delivery is so structured;
- h. Able to determine when service is misdirected, ineffective, or should be terminated and able to orient interactions toward redirection or termination;
- i. Able to make an objective and competent assessment of the helping transactions.

All graduating students are able:

- a. To state coherently and systematically the understanding they have of the nature of individual and collective behavior and/or change; to relate that understanding to the process of social work intervention, and to their own practice; to identify alternative understandings and defend their own choice while recognizing limitations and uncertainties;
- b. To indicate the major constitutional and administrative structure responsible for social service systems in Canada; to articulate in detail the legislation, ministries, administration and services that bear upon a selected social service field; to utilize a model of analysis to discern critical features of these structures;
- c. To state the ethical code of the profession of social work, and the functions and utility of the organized profession, to evaluate critically the factors which affect the functioning and development of the profession;
- d. To carry out an analysis of a social problem, stating the model of analysis used, and covering the dimensions of the problem, theories as to etiology, the effects of the problem in the lives of people affected by it and on the society, major policies and means employed in dealing with it and the degree of their effectiveness, proposals for further attack on the problem, obstacles to improvement, implications for social work, personal implications;
- e. To carry out an analysis of a service programme in which the student practices, including objectives design, task distribution, authority relations, participative patterns, consumer selection, service accessibility, consequences, modes of improvement;
- f. To conduct effective interviews, conscious of purpose, giving leadership without obstructing expression by the other(s), and able to record interviews, including the practitioner's behaviour;
- g. To obtain data necessary for practice, knowing what kinds of data are relevant, ability to assess utility for practice;
- h. To utilize the results of research inquiries into practice and to know major defects in research design that can result in misleading results;
- i. To administer task assignments responsibly, to relate with understanding to colleagues, to apply knowledge of organizational processes to the enhancement of functioning, to represent professional principles of consumer rights and practitioner self-determination with the organization;
- j. To function creatively in group situations, contributing to the clarity of group goals, to constructive interaction, to group efficiency.

In selected areas of study, each student shall have demonstrated abilities of a more sophisticated order pertinent to the area of study. Thus, students of social policy are able to list major current policy issues and are able to analyze a policy is-

sue. Students in research are able to assess researchable questions, apply quantitative methodology, design a study, prepare a research report. Students who study particular theories of practice are able to describe and assess them and are able to apply them in specified action exercises.

Throughout this programme, all students are able to assess their own performance as learners and as persons related to other people (e.g. clients, colleagues, faculty), being able to identify their value positions, their application of knowledge, their commitment to client self-determination, the degree and limits of their personal and social commitment, their capability in learning, the quality of their feelings for others, the reliability and limits of their performance, and act accountably in response to the assessment.²

The ratio of faculty to students is moderately low, and at the time of accreditation (December 1973) ranged from 1 to 18 for the first and second years to 1 to 12 for the third and fourth years. This ratio has not changed appreciably since that period.

The 24 full-time faculty members have been recruited primarily from the practice community; all have at least a master's degree and 6 possess doctorates. Only 12.5 percent have taught in other universities. Faculty recruitment patterns have produced a young group of colleagues (mean age, 35.3 years) with diverse interests who have taught at the school for a mean average of slightly over four-and-one-half years. Diversity of backgrounds has buffered against ideological uniformity. Relatively young ages and a positive, explicit orientation to change as a characteristic of the school have resulted in a general openness to new ideas. These characteristics also set the stage for genuine exploration of the meaning of competency-based education in social work at the University of Calgary.

BEGINNINGS

At the end of the 1971-72 academic year when introduction of the first and second years of the BSW program was realized, a complete program review was made. Since the BSW was considered the functional equivalent of the MSW program for which the school had a statement of purpose, effort during the year was spent not on program goals, but on the development of new courses and course content to lay the groundwork for subsequent years. As a result, most faculty perceived the program as diffuse and lacking clear direction. Discussion produced three major decisions that were to have considerable impact on the program's future:

- a. *Performance-based objectives:* The school committed itself to expressing course, year and program objectives in terms of performances that could be observed and judged.
- b. *Confluent learning:* The school committed itself to the de-

velopment in each year of confluent educational patterns in which the significance of the separate course unit of instruction is diminished in favor of integrated studies across course subject divisions ("confluent" was meant to represent the integrational flowing together of learning programs both between distinct subject areas and between affective and cognitive domains in the participants).

- c. *Teaching teams:* To facilitate (a) and (b) to provide for administrative flexibility and responsiveness, teaching teams were established for each year of the program. Insofar as possible, each team was developed so as to include faculty representation from each of the four sequences (Human Behavior and the Social Environment; Social Problems Provision and Policy; Methods and Practicum; Evaluation and Research) that had until that point been the major foci for curriculum development and organization.³

THE DEVELOPMENT OF SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

The transition from general to specific or behavioral objectives was difficult. First, faculty were unfamiliar with the concept and actual functioning of behavioral objectives in the curriculum. Long discussions of issues related to the behavioral specification of objectives took place before faculty were willing to try to write them. While time-consuming, this period of discussion was important, for it clarified faculty concerns that had not been voiced earlier concerning the place of specific objectives in the curriculum.

Second, a minority of instructors was opposed to stating objectives specifically before students were to participate in learning experiences. These instructors tended to stress the advantages of encouraging students to interact with experiences as they naturally unfolded and to discover the relevance of the experience through a process of emerging awareness. For these faculty, the specification of objectives was seen as a barrier to learning and a constriction on creativity.

Third, the fact that overall program goals were diffuse, frustrated individual faculty who were willing to write their own course objectives. Nonetheless, it was resolved to proceed since the specification of objectives would help to produce useful data later when BSW program objectives had been revised more clearly.

Fourth, it became apparent that the necessary skills were lacking to implement the stated intentions; for example, most of the faculty did not know how to write behavioral objectives. At that time (May 1972), only 4 percent of the course objectives then provided by the program were written as behavioral objectives.

With support from the faculty, a workshop designed to teach instructors how to create specific objectives was scheduled for the summer session. Two periods were scheduled for a behavioral objec-

tives workshop. The first workshop would introduce and further develop the concept of behavioral objectives and give participants an opportunity to identify and create a series of behavioral objectives through simulation experiences. Between the first and second workshops, faculty would rewrite their course objectives. The second workshop was designed to allow individual faculty to present their behavioral objectives to the entire group, who would offer suggestions and assistance. Because of the summer holiday, few faculty were available to participate. This seriously hampered these initial efforts.

Overall, the summer workshop program met with limited success. While a number of instructors found the program useful in developing objectives for their courses, others were still experiencing difficulty. No follow-up was planned. An evaluation of the extent to which progress had been made toward a behaviorally stated curriculum was scheduled for four months later.

As stated earlier, the faculty had also committed themselves to the development of teaching teams and to the introduction of confluent learning as an organizing concept within learning experiences. Teaching teams were also formed during the summer period. Almost all of the instructors who had opposed the use of behavioral objectives, but who identified with the confluent learning proposal, formed themselves into a teaching team at the second or sophomore year. Those who were committed to the use of behavioral objectives also formed a teaching team at the third or junior year of the BSW. The third-year team began to be vocally assertive and demanded that the second-year team specify the abilities of students completing the second year so that the information could be used for planning purposes. The second-year team assumed the characteristics of a beleaguered enclave and concentrated on developing their own alternative learning model.

In November, a small group of faculty and students conducted a survey to determine the extent to which courses were organized using behavioral objectives. In a report to the school, the committee noted that of the total number of course objectives, 11.3 percent were stated in behavioral terms. Further inquiry showed that slightly over 72 percent of the behavioral objectives were written by persons who attended the first faculty development program.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF INSTRUCTIONAL MODULES

During the same academic year (1972-73), one faculty member had begun to experiment with the development of a small instructional unit format known by various names: The Keller System⁴ (after Fred Keller who popularized the format), Personalized System of Instruction (PSI), or Mastery Learning. The format was character-

ized by the use of behavioral objectives, criterion-referenced testing, pass/no-pass evaluations, self-pacing (students completed instructional units at their own speed within the semester allowed for the course), extensive use of student tutors, immediate feedback to students during testing, lectures, discussions, and films as optional learning experiences, and a number of instructional units each designed to be completed in 2-5 hours of concentrated study. This course was developed at the third-year undergraduate level and was designed to acquaint students with the range of interventive approaches often used in social work practice with large and small social systems.

When the PSI self-study format was compared with the traditional lecture-discussion approach, no differences were apparent between student groups on short-answer examinations over the course content.⁵ The large majority of students who chose the PSI format reported that they would do so again. During the academic year, because of its visibility, the PSI course generated considerable interest among students and faculty and was viewed positively by most.

By the year's end, other instructors of the third-year teaching team had announced plans to offer a "social welfare as a social institution" course and a methods course in modular form. A faculty member assigned to coordinate off-campus and continuing education courses also became interested in extending the idea of modular learning programs to the development of portable learning packages that could be exported throughout the province. No other instructors outside the third year, however, declared similar intentions.

THE ADMISSIONS PROCESS

The trend toward operationalizing objectives in the curriculum also influenced the admissions process. Early in 1973 an admissions system was adopted by the school that also was oriented to performance. Students were admitted to the program on the basis of two performance criteria: past academic performance as indicated by grade point average and extracurricular educational activities, and past activities directly related to social work. The admissions system is based on the assumption that the best indicator of future academic performance is past performance, and the best indicator of future engagement in social work activities is past similar activities. The rating system assigns approximately equal weight to both elements, and a deficit in one area may be balanced by an excess in the other.

Within the academic performance area, the number of points earned varies directly with the grade point average and extracurricular educational experiences. It is unnecessary for the activities to be credited formally. In the practice experience section, the number of points to be earned varies directly with the frequency and duration

of past volunteer or work activities that may be considered related directly to social work practice. Additional points may be earned if the applicant had responsibility for organizing, directing, or evaluating the activity. A cutoff point is selected that will admit the most competitive students relative to the limited number of positions in the program. Ratings are completed by several judges to identify and reduce possible error.

The result is the selection of students somewhat older than the average applicant, who are academically capable, and who have some past formal or informal experiences related to social work. While the system is not considered appropriate for special programs in which the selection process may be altered, it is considered applicable to the general BSW program.

1972-73 PROGRAM REVIEW

At the conclusion of the academic year in May 1973, a retreat was held for the purpose of a complete program review. Based on the experiences of the year, several strategic decisions were made relative to competency-based programming.

Continued Development of all Learning Experiences Defined by Behavioral Objectives and the Terminal Objectives of the BSW in Behavioral Terms

As mentioned above, the third-year teaching team had identified behavioral objectives for all of the third-year courses and had attempted to develop each course content as an integrated whole. In their report to the school, the team expressed satisfaction with this approach to objectives as a clear and accountable orientation to student achievement that was clearly related to the development of practice competence.

The third-year team had written most of the behavioral objectives. The second-year team, at that point, continued to be opposed to the prespecification of behavioral objectives. The first-year team was isolated from the rest of the program both in terms of the team structuring of faculty, and because admission to the program came at the beginning of the second year. First-year courses were also considered by most faculty to serve a general public information and orientation function to social work and social welfare rather than being integrally related to professional education.

Continuance of the Confluent Education Experiment

During the year, faculty teaching at the second-year level became a cohesive unit as a result of the self-selection process for forming

teaching teams, the charismatic leadership of the team leader, and a relatively high degree of interpersonal attraction among team members. This cohesiveness was also fostered by the difficulties and the rewards of attempting to facilitate "experiential learning" over the academic year using general personal growth objectives, and subtle but assertive hostility from the third-year team for the perceived "failure" of the second-year team to specify behaviorally its objectives relative to practice.

The decision to continue the confluent learning experiment produced an altered rationale for the purpose of the second year: along with content goals of providing foundation knowledge for social work, the development of personal and self-directed learning would be emphasized.

Continued Use of Teaching Teams

While the teaching teams functioned almost like three autonomous units, with unsatisfactory linkages between program years, the cohesiveness within each of the teams prevented a resolution for reorganization to develop. To ameliorate this problem, each team was directed to define the entry-level abilities required of students for each program year, as well as the behavioral objectives for all courses. This process was stimulated and monitored by a series of ad hoc reviews initiated by the Academic Policy Committee.

This strategy, however, failed to promote interteam cooperation. Each team simply declared its entry and exit point expectations, and challenged the other teams to make the necessary adjustments. Attempts to promote a more integrated program were continually thwarted by team functioning.

Block Practica in both Third and Fourth Years

While a one-semester block program for field training had already been planned for the fourth year (to be initiated in the fall of 1973), the third-year teaching team also decided to switch to this format from a concurrent field teaching system. The switch to a block practicum arrangement was also aided by the development of instructional units in all third-year courses that were portable and did not require the constant presence of the instructor.

1973-74 ACADEMIC YEAR

During the 1973-74 academic year, the full complement of senior or fourth year courses of the BSW was offered (selected offerings had been available to students with advanced standing during

summer sessions). The percentage of behavioral objectives in the program increased to 61 percent of the total. It also resulted in one additional fourth-year course in behavior modification, offered in a PSI format.

At the third-year level, all courses were taught in field settings using a small portable instructional unit format, and the practicum setting steadily assumed the characteristics of an instructional center for individuals and small groups. Both field and university-based faculty began to perceive their roles as mutually interdependent. Those at the third-year level met with groups of students for topical discussions related to instructional units in field settings. While in the field, university-based faculty often acted as informal applied consultants to both students and field instructors. Field instructors began to help students master the instructional units related to what had been previously university-based courses and to relate conceptual material to practice settings and experiences. This pattern persisted over both semesters.

By the end of the first semester, the draft of the school's BSW performance objectives was completed, endorsed by the faculty, and included in the report being compiled as part of an accreditation application to the Canadian Association of Schools of Social Work (these program objectives were described earlier).

The Academic Policy Committee, which was to have encouraged further curriculum development, suffered the loss of its chairman through sabbatical leave one semester and illness the other. Consequently, the committee assumed a more passive stance and did not act vigorously to carry out its mandate from the spring program review.

The second-year team continued its activities related to confluent learning and still resisted the prespecification of performance objectives. At the year's end, a change in the composition of this team occurred; the team leader resigned and another faculty member assumed leadership.

The first-year team continued to offer courses with minimal reference, if any, to behaviorally stated objectives. Although courses were well received, they had few characteristics of a competency-based program.

During the academic year the number of behavioral objectives had increased. While progress in implementing a competency-based program had been made in the third and fourth years, little had been accomplished in this direction at the first and second years. The school continued to endorse the pursuance of competency-based education, confluent learning, and team teaching as program characteristics. No major changes were proposed for the following year in relation to the BSW.

1974-75 ACADEMIC YEAR

Several new factors began to influence the development of the competency-based curriculum at Calgary. First, the school committed itself to the introduction of a new master's degree specialist program in social work. As a result, several faculty shifted their energies to the development of this program. Second, new faculty were recruited and given only a limited orientation to the competency-based curriculum plan. Thus they joined a teaching team and organized their classes according to prior experience.

Third, the second-year teaching team, under new leadership, received a grant to develop and evaluate the functioning of the confluent learning design. Fourth, the faculty member with continuing education responsibilities had returned from sabbatical leave with a heightened interest in the development of PSI teaching formats, modular instruction, and behavioral objectives and was assigned to the second-year team. Fifth, a dramatic shift occurred in administrative leadership; while necessary at the time, the assumption of new administrative responsibilities by several faculty on an interim basis limited their effectiveness.

The first year teaching team continued as before with no significant changes in curriculum design. The second-year team began to revise its definition of confluent learning to include the specification of performance objectives and PSI learning formats, and began to experiment creatively with simulations.⁶ The revisions appeared to relate to new leaders' ip, a new evaluation system required explicitly by the grant mentioned above, and the inclusion of a faculty member returning from sabbatical leave with an interest in competency-based education. A communications course at the second-year level emerged in behavioral terms and included learning experiences in small instructional units corresponding to objectives. A PSI format took shape for a class in group behavior. The instructor also began to develop a grant for the redevelopment of several continuing education courses into a PSI structure. This new orientation, which began to blend the confluent philosophy with an orientation toward performance, was captured by one instructor who introduced a group assignment with: "I hear and I forget; I see and I remember; I *do* and I understand."

The competency program at the third-year level began to erode, as evidenced by a reduction in the proportion of performance objectives from 100 percent the previous year to approximately 30 percent in the spring of 1975. Changes in team composition occurred, seemingly related to this finding, in the form of a reduction in team resources for continuing the previous year's work. Before the beginning of the academic period, two faculty with an interest in competency-based education had left the third-year team and were replaced by

faculty who did not share similar interests.

The fourth year was mixed in terms of performance objectives. Much of the attention previously directed toward this program level in the 1973-74 year was now redirected to the new master's degree program, and so developmental efforts at the fourth-year level were limited.

A review of the program for 1974-75 revealed widespread concern over its structure and level of functioning. Overall, performance objectives had been reduced to slightly less than 44 percent of the total. Clearly, team structures were markedly reducing the coordinated development of the program as a whole, and steps were taken to correct this problem through reorganization and by giving greater attention to instructional sequences throughout the four years. The Academic Policy Committee was to centralize and coordinate further development efforts. Additionally, a grant was to be sought for converting other courses into PSI formats.

The changing composition of faculty illustrated the unintentional withdrawal of developmental resources from the third year and the introduction of resources into the second year. The result was a dramatic reversal in the rate of developmental efforts.

OBSERVATIONS ON THE CALGARY IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

The case example just described offers a point of departure for identifying a number of factors that influenced curriculum revision. These change elements may be addressed by other schools in the redesign of curricula, and are presented below.

Initial reliance on diffuse BSW goals retarded the development of further changes in the curriculum. Program revision should include a consideration of curriculum thrust, and hence program goals, as a first step. Goal-setting provides a framework for the entire curriculum revision process.

Clear, explicit administrative support is a distinct aid to implementation efforts. Without this support, faculty are unlikely to perceive revision as a major organizational goal. In the Calgary example, the administrative leadership supported a competency-based program, but informally. This was not sufficient to further revision efforts systematically, and so change took place more slowly.

A useful, practical resource system for faculty members is essential in order to develop areas of the curriculum for which they have responsibility. This is particularly true for changes that call for faculty to develop new skills and approaches to teaching. This system is usually comprised of materials, staff assistance, and oppor-

tunities for curriculum consultations with knowledgeable persons outside the program. An explicit resource system was unfortunately absent during implementation efforts at Calgary. As a result, except for informal assistance, no help was planned or available for persons experiencing difficulty.

In addition to a resource system, it is helpful to clearly delegate authority to individuals and working groups within the organization who will carry responsibility for specific aspects of revision. This element was not present in the Calgary program, and as a result changes tended to take place according to the ebb and flow of faculty interests. Schools considering similar changes may wish to identify tasks and persons responsible for their accomplishment on an explicit, planned basis.

The establishment of behavioral objectives for core competencies in the curriculum is an important aspect of revision efforts. These objectives will in large part guide the selection of instructional content. During the Calgary experiment it became clear that while the basic idea of behavioral objectives was simple, their actual conception required skill and practice. It appears essential for schools to enlist the aid of resources and persons already skilled in creating specific objectives.

Because the competency-based curriculum requires new faculty skills in such activities as writing precise instructional objectives and creating smaller instructional units, an ongoing faculty development program is very functional. From the Calgary experience it may be concluded that prioritizing faculty development and providing time for all faculty to participate is important.

In acquiring new skills, it was observed and should have been expected that faculty would not progress at similar rates. In assisting faculty to develop behavioral objectives, for example, an individualized follow-up program for each faculty member would have been invaluable to ensure the relatively initial transition to greater specificity. Schools contemplating similar changes in the specification of objectives or other areas requiring new faculty skills should consider this possibility.

It is important to consider an organizational structure that will aid communication throughout the BSW program and promote the diffusion of educational innovations. At Calgary the structural change to teaching teams adversely affected implementation by decreasing communication between teams and polarizing ideas. At the same time, teaching teams did foster integration among courses within each year.

In curriculum revision it is important to consider the way in which various proposals for change may influence one another when

they are adopted. In the present example, the proposals for behavioral objectives, confluent learning, and teaching teams were adopted simultaneously, with relatively undesirable consequences for overall competency-based implementation efforts. In this instance it might have been more useful to consider sequencing the implementation of proposals for change in organizational functioning.

The work load carried by most faculty will determine the extent and rate of curriculum revision. During the implementation period at Calgary, social welfare faculty members had assumed over twice the average work load of other university faculty. Consequently, competing activities connected primarily with teaching and with coordinating teaching/learning experiences limited the time they could spend on revision efforts. Shifting to a competency-based curriculum model requires developmental work by all faculty members. They must have ample time to bring about changes. It is sometimes assumed that the revision of a curriculum can be accomplished as an adjunct to "normal" faculty activities. For major changes to occur, this is not the case.

Consideration may be given to devising a system of incentives to motivate faculty to participate in revision efforts. In the present example an incentive system was not used. As most faculty are aware, aside from a desire to teach and perform research, a host of contingencies and incentives, both extrinsic as well as intrinsic, act as motivational determinants for professorial behavior. At Calgary, in the absence of a new organizational reward system, many faculty tended to work toward almost the same goals as previously. For schools contemplating the use of an incentive system, it may be suggested that such a system needs to be developed with the consent of those concerned, and stated explicitly to minimize the possibility of idiosyncratic bias in its use.

Educators are most likely to adopt an educational innovation when they have the opportunity to observe its use and to evaluate its workability as it operates in their own curriculum. At Calgary, the adoption of small instructional modules, initially at the third-year level, was facilitated by the opportunity for faculty to see them in action, to discuss their use, and to receive student feedback concerning their value as learning tools.

Finally, the explicit evaluation of both curriculum process and outcome is a spur to innovation and curriculum change. The grant given to the second-year teaching team to develop and evaluate the confluent program accentuated the team's commitment to careful evaluation of process and outcome, and hence to student performance. This illustrates the importance of an evaluation component in curriculum development. An evaluation system serves to focus interest

and attention on tasks relevant to curriculum change and also provides the feedback necessary for adjustments in change efforts. The academic review at Calgary served a similar function.

ADDITIONAL IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES

The preceding discussion of developmental efforts at the University of Calgary identified a number of factors that influenced the implementation of the competency-focused curriculum (which is still in process). Also, a number of conceptual design issues arose that may confront faculties who are in the initial exploration phase of adoption. They, too, have been discussed elsewhere.⁷

There are, however, other important issues that bear upon the implementation of competency-based programs.

1. *Selecting competencies.* Most programs will differ in their approach to initial identification of competencies. Some simply will specify goals that already describe present programs. Others will attempt to generate a new consensus of what specific competencies should characterize programs. Forecasting techniques are usually a sophisticated means of identifying competencies that can be agreed upon by a pool of forecasters. A task analysis of social work roles in relation to social problems is another means of identifying behavioral objectives for some programs. Whatever the initial method, it is important to define competence on the basis of the students' ability to achieve desirable objectives, as soon as possible. This is necessary to ensure an empirical rather than consensual basis for competence. An empirical orientation will require the collection of client-relevant data to substantiate the assertion of competent performance as well as to maintain the competency design as an open and self-correcting system. The identification of competencies basically should be an empirical matter to be resolved over time.
2. *Identify both relevant and feasible tasks.* In implementing a competency-based curriculum, it may be helpful for schools to prioritize tasks to be accomplished in terms of importance and feasibility. While working on changes important to the school as a whole, it is necessary to sustain enthusiasm for the project. Developmental goals should be chosen that have a strong likelihood of being realized. More difficult tasks can be reduced to their component parts and performed in a series of steps.
3. Thus far most schools have not specified in a statement of

objectives the *environmental context for meeting competencies*. This may be necessary to avoid undue narrowness in defining the competency. On the other hand, a definition of the context is significant in determining the extent to which the competence was actually demonstrated. Perhaps identifying a range of acceptable contexts would be more useful as information to students than identification of a single situation. Particularly in field settings, a provision for students to take advantage of the opportunities, to document the performance, and then to seek to have it judged by program assessors at a later date could be made.

4. Since the focus of the design is competent practice performance, agency-based supervisors as well as others in field settings will have to be familiar with and supportive of the curriculum design if students are to experience a functional continuity in their education. This implies that schools initiate a program of agency staff training and development to ensure the field resources necessary for educational continuity, which is important after students graduate as well. Since behavior is largely a function of the environmental settings, if the field settings continue to reward process activities but ignore performance related to outcomes, the likelihood that the student will maintain newly developed practice behavior is very low. This raises the question of whether the sole mission of social work education should be to educate individuals or also to restructure social systems from which individual behavior may be considered a derivative.
5. *Avoiding "oversell."* Indeed, it is easy to become enthusiastic over the competency-based educational model, yet enthusiasm is not a substitute for careful analysis, discussion, and the hard work of curriculum building. Current educational philosophy and practice rightly pose a challenge to new curriculum designs. These challenges need to be realistically addressed since they act as a spur to the further articulation of competency-based education in social work. The danger of "oversell" by proponents of the competency-based model is that legitimate concerns of faculty may be overlooked or ignored. The competency-focused program described above does not represent a faculty decision. It is, instead, a choice that faculty is in the process of making. Perhaps it is more realistic to declare boldly one's hopes and goals for the development of a program, while modestly assessing progress toward their realization, particularly during early implementation.

SUMMARY

The case example of the University of Calgary has been described to illustrate how the structural features of the program, communication patterns, and other developmental activities influenced the progress of a competency-based program.

In one sense, the process of curriculum implementation is never complete, but is a continual process subject to modification and renewal. At Calgary the change being implemented is a marked departure from curriculum models with which the faculty had previously been acquainted. A long-range perspective is warranted for basic change to occur.

Finally, in the absence of an implementation model, the program underestimated the complexity of the task of curriculum revision. Because of this, many of the problems encountered and identified above were unanticipated, though rather painfully obvious on a post hoc basis.

One may be tempted to ask whether the process of implementation was successful. Efforts are continuing, with a better understanding of the factors that help and hinder the process. There have been periods of both encouragement and discouragement for all. Thus far progress has been sporadic but steady over the past four years. The faculty and students are committed to more effective social work practice. Although difficult, the experiment in competency-based education at Calgary continues to be considered worthwhile by both faculty and students.

NOTES

1. "BSW Accreditation Report, School of Social Welfare, University of Calgary," mimeographed (Calgary, Alberta: University of Calgary, December 1973), p. 7.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 18-21. Albert Comanor authored this statement of objectives at the University of Calgary.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.
4. Fred S. Keller, "Good-bye Teacher," *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (1968), pp. 79-89.
5. Frank W. Clark, "An Evaluation of a Personalized System of Instruction in Social Work," mimeographed (Calgary, Alberta: University of Calgary, 1975).
6. Mona Jacob, "Inside a Red-Skin," mimeographed (Calgary, Alberta: University of Calgary, 1975).
7. Andrew Armitage and Frank W. Clark, "Design Issues in the Performance-Based Curriculum," *Journal of Education for Social Work*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (Winter 1975), pp. 22-29.

Appendixes

Appendix A

Montana Social Work Competence Scale: Competency Examination Procedure, Spring Quarter 1975

COMPETENCY REQUIREMENTS FOR SOCIAL WORK GRADUATES

The Department of Social Work offers the first professional degree for social work practitioners, the Bachelor of Arts degree. Because no other credentialing process is currently utilized to control the quality of BA social work practitioners, the department has accepted responsibility for ensuring that each graduate is competent to practice social work.

Rather than assessing competency on the number of hours of

instruction or on the passing of specific courses, students will be required to demonstrate specific practice behaviors in seven major areas related to social work as assessed by a competency validation procedure. Each student completing the University of Montana Social Work Program should be able to demonstrate competency in relation to the following.

1. *Assessing the organizational context of practice*, including:
 - a. Practical knowledge of the purposes, procedures, policies, and services of your practicum agency.
 - b. Skill in representing the agency to clients and the community.
 - c. Understanding of the organizational structure of your agency and its implications upon your activities.
2. *Assessing the community context of practice*, including:
 - a. Awareness of the unique characteristics of the relevant community.
 - b. Awareness of the needs, problems, and concerns of the people you were serving.
 - c. Assessment of the impact and adequacy of existing social policy.
 - d. Knowledge of formal and informal resource networks within the community.
 - e. Effective utilization of community resources.
3. *Problem identification and assessment*, including:
 - a. Problem delineation and articulation.
 - b. Skill and thoroughness in obtaining relevant information.
 - c. Analysis of information obtained.
 - d. Interpretation of the problem and its relevant environment.
4. *Selection of an intervention plan*, including:
 - a. Understanding of intervention models.
 - b. Establishment of clear objectives for the intervention.
 - c. Ability to articulate a detailed intervention plan.
 - d. Provision of a cogent rationale for the strategy selected.
5. *Implementation of the intervention plan*, including:
 - a. Mobilization of appropriate resources.
 - b. Establishment of respective obligations and responsibilities.
 - c. Skill in appropriate intervention techniques.
 - d. Reaction to the process of change.
 - e. Effective handling of disengagement.
6. *Evaluation and feedback*, including:

- a. Understanding of the methodology for evaluation.
 - b. Ability to use outcome data to improve one's own practice.
 - c. Ability to use outcome data to provide feedback to the agency.
 - d. Reconsidering models of change in the light of specific experience.
 - e. Ability to use outcome data and experience to provide feedback to the community and to social policy.
7. *The professional context of practice*, including:
- a. Discriminating the orientation, role, and activities of social workers from those of other professionals.
 - b. Relating the objectives and values of the social work profession to one's own activities.
 - c. Formulation of a statement of one's own personal and role limits in the practice of social work.
 - d. Appreciation of one's own values and characteristic patterns of behavior and their effect on practice styles and skills.

Students are required to demonstrate competency in *all* seven areas listed above. The Social Work Competency Examination is the form to be used in that demonstration.

EXAMINING COMMITTEE

Each student will have his or her documentary material critiqued by a committee of two members of the faculty, appointed by the chairman of the department. The same two faculty members will conduct the supplementary one-hour examination. The department chairman will serve as an ex-officio member of each student's committee at his discretion. The chairman will advise each student of the constituency of his or her committee and the schedule for the examination meeting no later than ten days before the examination.

Students or faculty may request, in advance, that a certain individual *not* be on their committee or in the case of faculty, that they not examine a particular student. This request must be received by April 15 for those taking the spring quarter exam. No last minute changes will be made.

The first faculty member listed will serve as chairman of the Examining Committee and will be responsible for conducting the examination meeting, coordinating the committee's assessment of the student's competence, and reporting the results, in writing, to the chairman of the department.

SCHEDULING

Spring quarter exams will begin May 19 through June 11.

THE EXAMINATION

The burden of documenting, demonstrating, and defending practice skills, the application of appropriate social work principles, and the use of intervention techniques will be upon the student. Drawing directly from fieldwork experience, utilizing supervision and consultation with any other appropriate resources, the student is expected to do the following.

1. Complete the written examination. In evaluating student competency, major emphasis will be placed on the student's performance on the written examination. The exam questions provide a framework for organizing and presenting evidence of competency in social work practice. The evaluation forms used by the Examining Committee are tied directly to the exam, and students are strongly advised to follow the format of the examination in preparing their written materials.

Students are urged to write concisely, but not at the expense of thoroughness. Written materials should be sufficiently complete to attest to student competence without further elaboration. The Examining Committee will be asked to evaluate the written material *before* the oral examination is conducted.

The submission of supplementary case records, reports, letters, and/or statistical data is encouraged, provided such materials are tied to specific answers. Do not submit materials that are unrelated to the examination. Audio or video-recordings can be submitted provided arrangements have been made with the chairman of the Examining Committee.

2. Submit written materials a minimum of seven days prior to the scheduled examination meeting with the committee. You will need four copies of the exam for distribution, one each to committee members, one to the department chairman, and one for research purposes. Students may use departmental equipment for reproducing written material previously typed. Special arrangements may be made for duplicating "cassette" audiotapes. Videotape monitoring can be scheduled as needed in the videotape laboratory.
3. Defend and support documentary evidence of practice competence submitted to the Examining Committee at the scheduled examination meeting. This oral exam is to sup-

plement the written material. The meeting will be scheduled for one hour, allowing 60 minutes of direct examination time. Committee evaluation is in addition to the one-hour block. The management and use of the scheduled one-hour time will be discretionary with the Examining Committee, within the framework of its responsibility to judge adequately the practice competence of the student.

Members of the committee will have thoroughly prepared themselves for the examination by previously studying and evaluating the student's examination material. Any question or observations raised as to the student's competence should be formulated before the examination for discussion with the student at that time.

Again, the burden of demonstrating competence is upon the student, who will be prepared to explain, rationalize, and defend his or her work as evidence of competence to practice social work at the baccalaureate level. The student should also be prepared for discussion of techniques, skills, or methods not specifically employed in the practicum experience. The oral portion of the exam will be videotaped for research and reference purposes.

EVALUATION OF STUDENT PERFORMANCE

Evaluation of the student's performance will be completed by the Examining Committee following the examination and the results reported to the chairman of the department within 24 hours. However, committee members should be prepared to discuss their impressions of the student's performance with the student after the oral portion of the exam is completed.

The Examining Committee chairman will collate and summarize these evaluations in his or her report to the department chairman. A form will be provided for this purpose. Each of the ten responses will be rated by the two examiners on a five-point scale:

1	2	3	4	5
Clearly Inferior Answer		An Adequate Answer		Clearly Superior Answer

If a student receives two "clearly inferior" marks on any one question, he or she does not pass the question, and all questions must be passed to pass the exam.

As mentioned earlier, the committee members will rate each

item before the oral exam; during the oral portion this initial rating may be changed and that will then be the final mark. Committee ratings are then combined for the final rating. If on all ten questions the student averages a two or below, he or she does not pass the exam. The average must be *above a two*.

FINAL PRACTICUM GRADE

The final practicum grade assigned to the student will be based upon a comprehensive assessment of the student's ability to practice social work with beginning competence at the baccalaureate entry level to the profession as demonstrated by performance in supervised fieldwork and the competence examination.

One-half of the final grade will be determined by the supervisor rating and the other one-half by performance on the competence examination. Both areas must be passed to receive a passing grade.

Appendix B

Rating Scale for Montana Social Work Competency Exam, Spring 1975

Note to the Examiner: For each of the ten questions, a single five-point rating scale is provided.

BEFORE THE ORAL EXAM

Rate the written material, Questions one through ten, *completely before* the oral exam. Do this by placing a "W" in the appropriate space.

DURING OR AFTER THE ORAL EXAM

1. Using the same scale, indicate any *changes* in your rating resulting from the oral examination by placing an "O" in the appropriate space. This rating will be the final rating for that item. Do not erase the "W." If there is no change in rating just circle the "W" and that will be the final rating.
2. A place is provided just after the rating scale for the examiner to list the actual criteria he or she used in arriving at a rating for that question.
3. Overall rating: To obtain an *individual overall rating* calculate an arithmetic average by adding the ten individual ratings (remember to use the "O" ratings) and dividing by ten.
4. Take the individual ratings of each committee member and record them on the Combined Committee Rating Form. Record only the two final ratings for each question.
5. Average each committee member's overall rating to obtain the Total Performance Rating.
6. Turn in all three rating sheets (two individual sheets and combined form).

COMMITTEE MEMBER _____

STUDENT _____

PLACEMENT _____

1. *The organizational context of practice.* Identify your practicum agency. Describe the purpose and goals of the agency, and the services provided. Are there significant limitations to the service the agency can provide? How is eligibility for service determined? Indicate, via specific examples, how the policies and established procedures of your agency influenced your activities and the services you were able to provide.

1	2	3	4	5
Clearly Inferior Answer		An Adequate Answer		Clearly Superior Answer

Actual criteria used in rating: _____

2. *The community context of practice.* Describe the community context of your practicum experience. Were your services directed toward any specific subgroup or special social problem within the community? Are there unique characteristics of the region, community, or segment of the community which have particular relevance to your practice? What are the predominant problems, issues, and concerns of the people you were serving? To what degree were these concerns a function of broader community or social issues?

1	2	3	4	5
Clearly Inferior Answer		An Adequate Answer		Clearly Superior Answer

Actual criteria used in rating: _____

3. *Assessment of existing social policy.* Identify the major social policies and programs which affect the concerns of the population you were serving. Assess the impact of these policies upon the problems in question. If existing social policy is not adequate, describe what is needed and indicate how you, your agency, and other resources have attempted to address the need for new or revised social policy and programs.

1	2	3	4	5
Clearly Inferior Answer		An Adequate Answer		Clearly Superior Answer

Actual criteria used in rating: _____

4. *Utilization of community resources.* Describe the formal and informal social resource networks within the community which were relevant to your practice. Include a description of at least

three resources — these need not be restricted to formal social service agencies — whose services were particularly relevant to your activities. Describe a specific episode in which you served as a link between a client, group, or community and a community resource. Indicate why involvement outside your agency was appropriate, and detail your activities in establishing the linkage.

1	2	3	4	5
Clearly Inferior Answer		An. Adequate Answer		Clearly Superior Answer

Actual criteria used in rating: _____

5. *Problem identification and assessment.* Describe the episode of service — who? what? when? How did you become involved? Who requested service? Who was the target of the desired service? What exactly was the presenting problem, and who perceived the situation as a problem? What additional information did you seek, and how did you go about obtaining it? What was your conceptualization of the problem, and did it differ in any way from the conceptualization of others involved?

1	2	3	4	5
Clearly Inferior Answer		An. Adequate Answer		Clearly Superior Answer

Actual criteria used in rating: _____

6. *Selection of an intervention plan.* How did you synthesize the information you obtained into a coherent intervention plan? Outline your plan explicitly. What were the objectives of your intervention, and how were they determined? Identify the

model (or theory) that underlies your plan. Provide a brief outline of the major concepts and methods espoused by the model. Explain why you chose this model rather than others. What are the research findings concerning the efficacy and applicability of the model? How did these research findings affect your choice?

1	2	3	4	5
Clearly Inferior Answer		An Adequate Answer		Clearly Superior Answer

Actual criteria used in rating: _____

7. *Implementation of the plan.* What exactly did you do in carrying out your plan? What efforts were required to engage and maintain the active participation of those involved? What was the explicit or implicit contract that determined the respective expectations and responsibilities of everyone involved in the change effort? What specific techniques did you employ to facilitate constructive change? What difficulties arose, and how did you deal with them? How was disengagement handled?

1	2	3	4	5
Clearly Inferior Answer		An Adequate Answer		Clearly Superior Answer

Actual criteria used in rating: _____

8. *Evaluation and feedback.* Evaluate the effectiveness of your intervention with regard to immediate and long-term effects. To what extent were your objectives accomplished? What procedures did you employ to assess the overall effectiveness of your

efforts? How can you use this experience to further enhance your own skills? Did your experience strengthen or weaken in any way your appreciation of the model upon which you based your intervention?

1	2	3	4	5
Clearly Inferior Answer		An Adequate Answer		Clearly Superior Answer

Actual criteria used in rating: _____

9. *Feedback to the agency.* Use your practicum experience to analyze the effectiveness of your agency. To what extent were the services that you provided congruent with the stated purpose of the agency? (You may want to refer your answer to Question 1.) How effective is the current program of agency service? Which policies and procedures are viable, and which might be changed in order to aid more effectively in the problem-solving process?

1	2	3	4	5
Clearly Inferior Answer		An Adequate Answer		Clearly Superior Answer

Actual criteria used in rating: _____

10. *The professional context of practice.* How can the services you provided during your practicum be justified as social work? What distinguished your role and your activities from those of other professionals? What personal and role limits did you establish in dealing with clients and why? Can you identify the effects of your own attitudes, values, and characteristic patterns of behavior upon your activities as a social work practitioner?

1	2	3	4	5
Clearly Inferior Answer		An Adequate Answer		Clearly Superior Answer

Actual criteria used in rating: _____

11. *Potpourri* — This question is optional and will be evaluated only in the sense that it may provide for a more thorough understanding of previous answers. Please use this last question to relate anything at all that might help the reader of your examination to reach a more complete appreciation of your practicum experience. Was there an experience or a perspective that was, and is particularly meaningful to you, something that Questions 1 through 10 did not elicit?

OVERALL RATING: After the oral, compute an overall rating by averaging all ten final ("O") ratings.

1	2	3	4	5
Clearly Inferior Answer		An Adequate Answer		Clearly Superior Answer

Appendix C

Fieldwork Supervisor Evaluation Form Supplement to the Work-Experience Evaluation

Student _____

Date _____ Agency _____

Practicum Supervisor _____

To the supervisor:

Some of the ratings requested here will overlap the ratings which appear in the original Work-Experience Evaluation which you are also asked to complete. Please bear with us until a single merged doc-

ument can be developed. Within this document you should base your evaluation on your observations and impressions of the student's work throughout the practicum experience. If you observed marked improvement in certain areas in the course of the practicum, you may choose to weigh the student's later work more heavily in arriving at an overall rating. However, you are asked not to base your evaluation upon the written material that the student is submitting to the competency examination committee. Please base this evaluation upon your own experience in observing and supervising the actual behavior of the student in practice situations. Most of you will be quite familiar with the student's written competency examination materials, and an evaluation which is completely independent of those materials may well be impossible, but please attempt to make this evaluation as independent of the written material as you can manage.

Below a description of each area to be evaluated is followed by a scale. Please circle the appropriate number. Note specifically any comments in support of your ratings in the space provided.

1. *Understanding of the organizational context of practice.* Rating should reflect: knowledge of the purpose and goals of the agency and the services provided, knowledge of the limitations of agency service, knowledge of agency policies and procedures, and the ability to operate effectively within them.

1	2	3	4	5
Generally performance was clearly inferior		Generally performance was adequate		Generally performance was clearly superior

Comments _____

2. *Understanding of the community context of practice.* Rating should reflect: recognition of the unique characteristics of the community, context of the practicum experience, and especially that segment of the community which was of direct concern to

the student's work; and awareness of the predominant problems, issues, and concerns of the people the student was serving.

1	2	3	4	5
Generally performance was clearly inferior		Generally performance was adequate		Generally performance was clearly superior

Comments _____

3. *Assessment of social policy and social issues.* Rating should reflect: appreciation of the influence of social issues and social policy upon the problems of the individuals the student was serving, ability to identify areas where existing policies and programs are not adequate, and to suggest policies that could remedy the inadequacy.

1	2	3	4	5
Generally performance was clearly inferior		Generally performance was adequate		Generally performance was clearly superior

Comments _____

4. *Utilization of community resources.* Rating should reflect: degree to which the student acquired a working knowledge of all resources which were relevant to the practicum setting, and awareness of resources outside the network of formal social ser-

vice agencies which might have been helpful in the student's practice.

1	2	3	4	5
Generally performance was clearly inferior		Generally performance was adequate		Generally performance was clearly superior
Comments _____				

5. *Problem identification and assessment.* Rating should reflect: the ability to perceive and articulate the relevant factors surrounding the initial request for service, the ability to obtain thorough yet relevant information via interviews and other data collection techniques, and the ability to conceptualize the problem situation and delineate its critical dimensions.

1	2	3	4	5
Generally performance was clearly inferior		Generally performance was adequate		Generally performance was clearly superior
Comments _____				

6. *Selection of an intervention plan.* Rating should reflect: the ability to establish, in cooperation with the client, specific objectives for the change effort; the ability to derive a cogent intervention plan and specify the model or theory that underlies

the plan; and the ability to specify a rationale for the chosen plan.

1	2	3	4	5
Generally performance was clearly inferior		Generally performance was adequate		Generally performance was clearly superior
Comments _____				

7. *Implementation of the intervention plan.* Rating should reflect: the ability to engage and maintain the active participation of all parties involved, the ability to carry out the plan in a cogent and purposeful fashion, and flexibility in dealing with obstacles to progress and other process issues.

1	2	3	4	5
Generally performance was clearly inferior		Generally performance was adequate		Generally performance was clearly superior
Comments _____				

8. *Evaluation and feedback.* Rating should reflect: the ability to assess the extent to which the objectives of the intervention were accomplished, the ability to assess the general effectiveness of the change effort, the ability to learn from experience, and

the ability to use outcome data to refine one's commitment to specific models of change.

1	2	3	4	5
Generally performance was clearly inferior		Generally performance was adequate		Generally performance was clearly superior
Comments _____				

9. *Feedback to agency.* Rating should reflect: the ability to assess congruence between stated agency purpose and policies and actual agency functioning, and the ability to identify problem areas within the agency and to suggest viable changes that might improve agency service.

1	2	3	4	5
Generally performance was clearly inferior		Generally performance was adequate		Generally performance was clearly superior
Comments _____				

10. *The professional context of practice.* Rating should reflect: the ability to relate one's own activities to a reasonable definition of social work as a profession; the ability to distinguish the orientation, role, and activities of social workers from those of

other professions; the ability to establish personal and role limits in dealing with clients that were consistent with good judgment and social work ethics; and the ability to identify the effects of one's own attitudes, values, and characteristic patterns of behavior upon one's own practice.

1	2	3	4	5
Generally performance was clearly inferior		Generally performance was adequate		Generally performance was clearly superior
Comments _____				

